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Website: https://salar.news www.magzter.com 8 FEBRUARY 2024 | THURSDAY | BENGALURU | 28 RAJAB, 1445 AH Vol 4 | Issue No 33 | Pages: 8

U'KHAND 1ST STATE IN INDIA TO PASS UCC BILL

DEHRADUN, 7 FEB

Uttarakhand Assembly on Wednesday passed the Uniform Civil Code bill (UCC) which may serve as template for other BJP-run states to enact similar legislation.

The bill was passed by voice vote after a two-day debate. Opposition's proposal for referring the draft legislation to a select committee of the House on the ground that they did not get enough time to study its provisions was rejected.

Like marriages, live-in relationships must be registered. Live-in partners must not be under 18. But if any one of them is under 21, the registrar is bound to inform their parents or guardians.

Pushkar Dhami ***PHOTO: PTI***

The bill stipulates a penalty of up to a month in prison or a fine of Rs 10,000, or both, if the partners do not submit a statement on their relationship to the registrar within a month.

It will now be sent to President Droupadi Murmu for her assent after which it will become a law. BJP-ruled states like Gujarat and Assam appear keen to model their UCCs on the bill passed by the Uttarakhand Assembly.

Uttarakhand will now become the first state after Independence to get a common law on marriage, divorce, land, property and inheritance for all citizens, irrespective of their religion.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said the UCC will create equal laws for men and women across all faiths and will help create a non-partisan and non-discriminatory society. It will especially protect the rights of women and put an end to their exploitation.

Children born of live-in relationships will be considered legitimate and deserted women will be entitled to maintenance from their partners.

The bill effectively bans polygamy and 'halala' practised among a section of Muslims. Marriages, though, can be solemnised through separate rituals, like saptapadi, nikah and anand karaj, followed by different communities.

The bill applies to the whole of Uttarakhand and to people from the state living outside.

—PTI

2 murdered in Kumbarpet over property dispute

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Two individuals were brutally killed by assailants in Kumbarpet, on Wednesday night. The victims, Suresh and Mahendra who were selling kitchen appliances, lost their lives in what appears to be a property-related murder. According to DCP Shekhar of the Central Division, initial investigations suggest that the assailants, believed to be relatives of the victims, targeted Suresh. However, Mahendra, who was present at the scene, was also attacked when he attempted to flee.Suresh was found dead inside the shop and Mahendra in the push-cart parked outside the shop. A case has been registered at the Halasuru Gate Police Station.

—Salar News

Man stabbed over scolding boy for wheeling on cycle

SHIVAMOGGA, 7 FEB

A 23-year-old man was stabbed by a juvenile and his three friends after he allegedly scolded him for performing stunts on his bicycle and indulging in rash riding in Shikaripura town of this district, police said on Wednesday. The victim, Susheel, who works in a college as a computer operator, sustained stab injuries on his chest and stomach. However, his condition is stated to be stable, they said. According to the police, Susheel had taken his pet dog for a stroll on Tuesday evening when he saw a 16-year-old boy performing wheeling and riding his bicycle in a rash manner. He scolded the boy and this led to a heated argument between the two. The boy left the spot and later went near the victim's house along with his three friends. The boy along with his accomplices stabbed the victim with a knife and fled the spot. *—PTI*

Delhi on alert after court lets Hindus pray in Gyanvapi

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

After the 'Pran Pratistha' ceremony of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya and the Varanasi district court order allowing the Hindu side to offer prayers in the southern cellar of Gyanvapi mosque, Delhi Police has issued an advisory to all station house officers (SHOs) to remain vigilant and avoid any type of communal incidents in their area. It warned all the police stations to watch the activities of those involved in major protests, such as the anti-CAA-NRC protest, the farmers protest, and those involved in the 2020 Delhi riots. Delhi Police special branch also advised all the SHOs of all police stations to take precautionary actions to avoid any type of communal incident in their area. *—PTI*

2,000 suffer from food poisoning after meal at event

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 7 FEB

At least 2,000 people suffered from food poisoning after consuming food at a religious event held at a village in Nanded. A religious discourse was held in Koshtwadi village under Loha tehsil on Tuesday where locals and people from nearby villages gathered and consumed food. People started complaining of vomiting and loose motions Wednesday morning, the official said. ***—PTI***

K'taka seeks funds in Delhi, PM says Cong dividing nation

In Delhi, CM led a protest seeking Rs 1.87 lakh crore pending from Centre

NEW DELHI/ BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Karnataka Congress leaders led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday held a protest in Delhi against the Centre over injustice to the southern state in devolution of taxes. This sparked a fierce slugfest between the party and the Modi government.

As the leaders upped the ante with their 'Chalo Delhi' protest in Jantar Mantar just weeks ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a scathing counterattack on Congress and urged the Karnataka government to stop creating new narratives to divide the country as it jeopardises India's future.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also lashed out at Karnataka government, accusing it of having a "separatist" mindset and spreading "false narrative" about Centre's alleged discrimination against the state in fund allocation.

Sitharaman, who is also a Rajya Sabha member from Karnataka, accused Siddaramaiah and his colleagues of making "outrageously" false charges.

Sitharaman later told the Lok Sabha that the Centre has released all funds due to the Karnataka government as has been recommended by the Finance Commission from time to time.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and other Congress leaders during a protest against the Centre, at Jantar Mantar, in New Delhi on Wednesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

ongress has alleged that "injustice" has been meted out to Karnataka in tax devolution and grants-in-aid over the past few years.

The party leaders demanded that the Centre set right the losses to the tune of Rs 1.87 lakh crore allegedly incurred by Karnataka under the 15th Finance Commission.

Siddaramaiah said their protest is not against the BJP but the discrimination against Karnataka.

Dismissing BJP's allegation that the protest was aimed at raking up a North-South divide, he said the Congress wants the country to be united but there should be no discrimination against the southern states.Replying to the debate in the Rajya Sabha on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, Prime Minister Modi accused Karnataka of building a narrative to divide the country through advertisements. The State government had brought out front page 'My Tax My Right' advertisments in major dailies to highlight what it said was the "financial atrocities committed by the Central government on Kannadigas and Karnataka".

"What is this narrative being played to break the nation. What is this language being spoken?

"It poses a threat to the future of the country. Make efforts to take the country along," he said. Siddaramaiah said the formula used to devolve taxes to the states, especially Karnataka, under the 14th Finance Commission was changed by the 15th Finance Commission and called for reverting to the old formula to stop the loss of revenue for his state.

Shivakumar said Karnataka ranks second in Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection and is the biggest contributor to the country's revenue.

Sitharaman claim that the Siddaramaiah government is feeling the heat due to the financial burden of nearly Rs 58,000 crore for implementation of his party's poll promises.

—PTI

>>>More on Page 2

> **Centre sent an expert committee to study the drought in Karnataka and submitted the report. However, till today, they have not released the money. This is the last resort; we have to protest.** -KH Muniyappa, Karnataka Minister

> **Over Rs 1 lakh crore is due to Karnataka. We held meetings with the Union Home Minister, Union Finance Minister, but to date, we have not received our money.** -Satish Jarkiholi, Karnataka Minister

> **Karnataka CM's accusations lack any solid grounds. They are so unfounded that their own party must be laughing at the sheer ignorance in CM's hollow allegations.** -Pralhad Joshi, Union Minister

> **The protest is not a show of strength, but the voice of the people of the State. Congress will fight it out, and will take the issue to the streets of Karnataka, if things continue in the same way, and the central government doesn't address the concerns.** -DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

In RS, Modi tears into Cong again

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday stepped up his attack on Congress, alleging that it is "outdated" and "out-of-warranty".

Replying to the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address in Rajya Sabha, Modi again expressed confidence of winning a third consecutive term and outlined his vision for the next five years, saying the Modi 3.0 government will put all its might in making India a developed nation.

Noting that a "challenge" to Congress has come from West Bengal that it will not be able to cross 40 seats, he said, "I pray you can save 40. We have been listening to your every word with great patience and humility. But even today you have come prepared not to listen."

Modi targeted Congress saying there is public anger against the party because of its deeds and pointed to its dwindled strength in Lok Sabha.

Citing a letter written by Jawaharlal Nehru to chief ministers, Modi said it clearly states that the first prime minister was against reservation of any kind, especially in jobs, as it adversely affected the functioning of the government.

"Congress which never gave complete reservation to OBCs, which never gave reservation to the poor of the general category, which did not consider Baba Saheb worthy of Bharat Ratna, kept giving Bharat Ratna only to its family. They are now preaching to us," he said.

Mod's remarks came in the backdrop of the Congress accusing the Modi government of running away from a caste census and promising to remove the 50 per cent cap on reservation.

In an apparent swipe at Rahul Gandhi, Modi called him "Yuvraj" and said the Congress is trying to make him a "Start-Up" but he is a "non-starter" who is neither being lifted nor is being launched. *—PTI*

Narendra Modi ***PHOTO: PTI***

LS passes interim Budget

Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed the Rs 47.66-lakh-crore interim Budget 2024-25 of the Union Government with a voice vote. The lower house also approved the Rs 1.8 lakh crore budget for Jammu and Kashmir with a voice vote.

Kharge's RS remarks expunged

Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge in Rajya Sabha on Wednesday objected to Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar expunging portions of his reply to the motion of thanks on President Droupadi Murmu's address. Kharge demanded that his expunged remarks be restored.
Dhankhar said he will give his ruling on it later. "I will be happy to revise unparliamentary expressions. I may constitute a committee on that point," Dhankhar said.

30 dead in Pak twin blasts

KARACHI, 7 FEB

At least 30 people were killed and more than 40 others injured on Wednesday in twin blasts targeting election offices in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province, a day before the general elections in the coup-prone country.

In the first incident, a powerful blast outside the office of independent candidate Asfandyar Khan Kakar in Pishin district killed 20 people and wounded 30 others.

PHOTO: PTI

Less than an hour later, another blast took place outside the election office of a Jamiat-Ulema Islam-Pakistan in the Killa Abdullah area claiming the lives of 10 people and injuring 22 others, officials said.

No group or individual claimed responsibility for the twin blasts.

Abdullah Zehri, a senior police official in Balochistan Panjgur, said that the blast outside the election office of candidate Asfandyar Khan Kakar was detonated remotely and was placed in a bag outside the building. *—PTI*

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KARNATAKA BANS HOOKAH BARS

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

The Karnataka Health and Family Welfare Department has banned the hookah bars in the state. The department issued an order on Wednesday and invoked the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) 2003 and 2015 for enforcement with immediate effect.

The order stated that prohibition of sale of various hookah products, including tobacco and nicotine-containing substances, flavoured and flavourless molasses, shisha, and similar items to be banned. This move comes after health experts thoroughly examined the adverse effects of hookah bars and recommended for the ban.

Earlier in September the Health Minister Dinesh Gundurao had previously indicated that the government will intend to ban hookah bars. Home Affairs G Parameshwara also highlighted that the government is planning to introduce the regulations to address to ban the hookah bars.

—Salar News

ECI allots new name to Sharad faction

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Election Commission on Wednesday allotted 'Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar' as the party name for the group led by Sharad Pawar.

The order by the poll authority came a day after it gave the Nationalist Congress Party name and the "clock" election symbol to the group led by Ajit Pawar, who had walked away with a majority NCP MLAs in the Maharashtra assembly in July last year.

The Commission had asked the Sharad Pawar group to suggest three names of which one could be allotted in view of the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections in Maharashtra.

Ajit faction files caveat in SC

The Ajit Pawar faction on Wednesday filed a caveat in the Supreme Court seeking a hearing if the Sharad Pawar group moves before it challenging an Election Commission order recognising the party led by the Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister as the real Nationalist Congress Party.

—PTI

BULLDOZERS WEAPONISED

'128 bulldozer actions left 617 Muslims homeless'

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

International human rights organisation Amnesty International released two reports on Wednesday over demolitions of Muslims' homes, businesses, and places of worship.

The reports detail 128 documented demolitions, with at least 33 instances of JCB's equipment being repeatedly used, affecting 617 individuals who were rendered homeless or deprived of their livelihoods.

Madhya Pradesh reported the highest number of demolitions at 56, the reports said.

It said that JCB brand machinery was weaponised as a tool in the hate campaign against minorities.

According to the reports, between April and June 2022, authorities in five BJP ruled states-- of Assam, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) governed state of Delhi-- carried out demolitions as a form of 'punishment' against Muslims following communal violence or protests against discrimination.

They called for immediate cessation of unlawful demolitions in the reports

Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General said, "The unlawful demolition of Muslim properties by the Indian authorities, peddled as 'bulldozer justice,' is cruel and appalling. Such displacement and dispossession are deeply unjust, unlawful, and discriminatory. They are destroying families and must stop immediately."

PHOTO: PTI

JCB bulldozers – 'brand of choice'

Amnesty verified that JCB's machines, while not the only vehicles used, were the most widely deployed equipment in these demolitions. Their repeated use have given rise to the use of monikers for the company like 'Jihadi Control Board' by Right-wing media and politicians.

A JCB spokesperson said that once products have been sold to customers, the company has no control over or responsibility for their products' use or abuse.

However, Amnesty wrote that such an explanation is not in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

"Under international standards, JCB is responsible for what third-party buyers do with its equipment. The company must stop looking away as JCB machines are used to target and punish the Muslims while people sloganeer anti-Muslim vitriol mounted from atop these bulldozers. JCB cannot continue to evade responsibility while its machines are used to inflict human rights abuses," said Callamard.

—Courtesy, Amensty

>>>Continued on Page 3

Set up AIIMS at Raichur: State ministers

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Karnataka Minister for Medical Education Sharan Prakash Patil and Minister for Minor irrigation NS Boseraju reiterated their demand to establish AIIMS in Raichur. According to the press release, Patil have highlighted the longstanding demand to establish AIIMS in Raichur to Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday. "We have explained to the Union Health Minister about developmental revolution that will unfold in the backward Kalyana Karnataka region once AIIMS is established," Patil said. Patil further noted that Karnataka is one of the few states in the country without this premier institution. Boseraju added, "Despite being covered under Article 371J, Raichur lacks adequate healthcare facilities and nearly for 646 days the agitation in raichur is going on to set up AIIMS." *—PTI*

Janaspandana programme to be held today

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Arrangements are made for Janaspandana, a State-level public grievance programme at Vidhana Soudha, headed by Chief Minister iddaramaiah, today. Department-wise counters and appointments of officers have been ordered to receive the complaints and appeals submitted by the public coming from different parts of the StateS. Chief Minister will be present to accept grievances from 10 am to 6 pm. People can also register online by calling 1902. Nodal Officers have been appointed for public consultation and an inquiry counter of experienced staff has been arranged for inquiries. A stall to acquire the basic information of the citizens and to guide them to the respective stalls has also been set up. Battery-powered buggies and wheelchairs have been arranged for senior citizens, physically handicapped citizens and pregnant women to take them to the stalls of the concerned departments. Also, the government has arranged free meals and drinking water for more than 7,000 people along with clean toilets for the public. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

De-linking provision for Gruha Jyoti now available

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

State government has started the provision of de-linking to consumers benefiting from the Gruha Jyoti scheme in case of shifting houses. Customers can now de-Link the present houses from the Seva Sindhu portal and link again with the details of a new residence, according to the press release from the State government. The Gruha Jyoti scheme allows a maximum consumption limit of 10 per cent over the units of monthly average consumption of each consumer up to a maximum consumption of 200 units. *—Salar News*

120 kg ganja seized from Mangaluru, 2 held

MANGALURU, 7 FEB

The Central Crime Branch (CCB) police here have arrested two people from Kerala and seized 120 kg of ganja which was being transported from Odisha to Mangaluru and Kerala. The arrested are MS Anoop, 28, from Wayanad; and KV Lathif, 36, from Kannur, police sources said. Acting on a tip-off, a team led by CCB inspector Shyam Sunder raided a place at Pilikur in Talapady on the Karnataka-Kerala border on Tuesday and arrested the two, sources said. The value of the seized ganja is Rs 28 lakh. Three mobile phones, Rs 4,020 in cash and a jeep have also been seized. The total value of the seized goods is Rs 35,14,520. The accused were planning to sell the ganja in Kerala and Karnataka. They used to smuggle ganja from Odisha via Andhra Pradesh and Bengaluru, sources said.*—PTI*

BJP leaders detained as they try to lay siege to CM's office

BJP staged the protest apparently to counter the dharna held in Delhi

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

BJP legislators were taken into preventive custody when they tried to lay siege to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's office as part of their protest against the alleged failures of Congress government on Wednesday.

BJP legislators and leaders led by the party State President BY Vijayendra staged a sit-in demonstration in front of Mahatma Gandhi's statue near Vidhana Soudha, which houses the State Legislature and Secretariat of Karnataka.

Thereafter, they marched towards the office of the Chief Minister, who was away in Delhi, inside the Vidhana Soudha, prompting police to take them into preventive custody.

BJP staged the protest apparently to counter the dharna held in Delhi by the ruling party under the leadership of Siddaramaiah to "fight for financial justice".

Holding placards, BJP protesters raised slogans condemning Congress government for allegedly failing to offer relief to drought-hit farmers and incentives to milk producers.

Former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai, Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly R Ashoka, Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council Kota Srinivas Poojary and many former ministers were among those who took part in the agitation.

Addressing the gathering, Bommai said, "There was never any other government, which did so much drama in the history of Karnataka by staging demonstrations at New Delhi against the Centre".

"The government has failed on every count, be it administration, law and order, development works, protecting the water resource of the state and drought management. How can they stage a demonstration in Delhi? They should be ashamed of it," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Vijayendra said the government which came to power "through the drama called 'five guarantees'" has failed on all fronts and the Chief Minister is clueless about what to do next.

"More than 500 farmers have committed suicide in the state but the government has not yet responded to them. Now it is trying to pass the buck to the Centre for its failure," he alleged. BJP MP BY Raghavendra alleged that Congress government is 'staging a political drama' to cover up its failures.Leader of Opposition R Ashoka challenged Congress to release documents of funds released by both Modi and Congress govt. He accused Congress of targeting Modi. Reacting to Suresh's remakes, Ashoka said, "Congress carries the DNA of Jinnah culture, which is why they want to divide the country. Congress has gone to Delhi to support Suresh in dividing the nation."

—Salar News

BJP State President BY Vijayendra, Opposition leader R Ashoka, Ex-CM Basavaraj Bommai and others protest against the State government in Bengaluru on Wednesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

IS BJP'S ALLIANCE WITH KANNADIGAS OR MODI: CONG

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) protested at the Congress House, criticising the State BJP for prioritising allegiance to Modi over the interests of Kannadigas. KPCC SC President R Dharmasena questioned whether BJP is siding with the people of Karnataka or with Modi. He highlighted concerns over injustice regarding taxes and funds. "Why is BJP not seeing the injustice happening against Karnataka regarding taxes and funds," he said. He said Congress ministers are in Delhi to demand justice over the lack of drought relief.

—Salar News

BELAGAVI: BJP BRINGS BUFFALOES TO DC'S OFFICE

BELAGAVI, 7 FEB

BJP leaders and workers staged a protest in front of the Belagavi DC office, bringing along buffaloes to the protest to condemn the State government's withholding of Rs 716 crore incentives owed to milk producers. The demonstration, headed by BJP State Vice-President Anil Benake, slammed the government over the delay in disbursing funds crucial to the livelihoods of dairy farmers.

An FIR has been lodged against 27 BJP workers, including prominent leaders such as Geeta Sutar, Subhash Patil, and Murgendra Gowda Patil for trespassing into Congress office.

Amid chants denouncing the Congress government and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, protesters marched from Channamma Circle to the DC office, waving milk cans as symbols of their discontent. They hit out at the ruling Congress government over the cancellation of pro-farmer schemes initiated during the BJP's tenure and highlighted the adverse impact of government policies on both people and livestock.

Benake alleged that during the BJP's governance, the dairy sector flourished, with daily milk collection averaging between 80 to 85 lakh litres from 26 lakh farmers. He said former chief minister Yeddyurappa's administration encouraged milk producers, enhancing the production levels.*—Salar News*

SC recommends Justice NV Anjaria as HC CJ

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Justice NV Anjaria *PHOTO: X*

- Justice Anjaria was appointed as a judge of the High Court of Gujarat on 21 November, 2011 and has been functioning there since then

Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud on Wednesday recommended the name of Gujarat High Court judge NV Anjaria as the Chief Justice of the Karnataka High Court.

The collegium, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna and BR Gavai, said a vacancy in the office of the chief justice of the Karnataka High Court would arise after the retirement of Justice PS Dinesh Kumar on 24 February. The collegium has proposed to appoint Justice Anjaria as the chief justice of the Karnataka High Court with effect from the date on which the incumbent chief justice demits office on retirement, it said.

"Justice Anjaria was appointed as a judge of the High Court of Gujarat on 21 November, 2011 and has been functioning there since then. Before his elevation as a judge of the high court, he practised in the High Court of Gujarat in civil, constitutional, company law, labour and service matters and specialised in civil and constitutional cases.

"He is a competent judge with a sound knowledge of law and possesses impeccable integrity. In his conduct as a judge, he has maintained the standard required of a person holding high judicial office," the collegium said.

While recommending his name, the collegium took into consideration the fact that among the chief justices of the high courts, one judge -- Justice Ashish J Desai, whose parent high court is the High Court of Gujarat -- is presently functioning as the chief justice of Kerala High Court.

"Justice Desai is due to demit office on 4 July, 2024. Having regard to all relevant factors, the collegium is of the considered view that Justice NV Anjaria is fit and suitable in all respects for being appointed as the chief justice of the High Court of Karnataka.

—PTI

I-T raids in various locations of City

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Income Tax officials on Wednesday conducted raids and inspections at several private companies in Bengaluru, two locations in Ballari, on suspicion of tax evasion. The raids commenced at 6 am and targeted companies across various locations including JC Road, Jayanagar, and Banashankari. More than 80 Innova vehicles were utilized by officials for simultaneous searches and document verifications. Additionally, raids were conducted at the house of VR Patil, a close aide of Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, in Koppal.

The owners of Srinivas Constructions in Ballari were among those raided by I-T officials. The officials also targeted Piccheswara Rao, a contractor in connection with alleged income tax evasion and disproportionate assets. The raids are reportedly part of a coordinated effort to crack down on tax evasion and ensure compliance with financial regulations. While the names of the companies under investigation have not been disclosed, suspicions of significant discrepancies in their financial records prompted the raids. *—Salar News*

Retd army man opens fire after fight with friends, held

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

A 65-year-old retired Indian Army Naik was arrested for allegedly opening fire after a heated argument under the influence of alcohol, police said on Wednesday.

Police said Parashuram went to 31-year-old Suraj's house in Abbigere and started arguing with him and his family members on Tuesday. The accused and Suraj's family had been friends and shared a good relationship. But of late, their relationship had strained due to some dispute, they said.

According to the police, when Suraj and his father stopped Parashuram from entering their house, it led to a heated argument between them. In a fit of rage, and allegedly under the influence of alcohol, Parashuram took out his licensed revolver and pointed it at Suraj, who ran away.

The accused then opened fire in the air creating panic. Neighbours calmed Parashuram down. Meanwhile, Suraj informed the police who rushed to the spot, arrested Parashuram and seized his revolver, a senior police officer said. Suraj alleged that Parashuram had known his family for the past few years and that he used to visit their house frequently under the influence of alcohol and quarrelled over trivial issues, he said. *—PTI*

PREP FOR JANASPANDANA

Arrangements being made on the evening of State level Janaspandana at Vidhana Soudha premises in Bengaluru on Wednesday. Janaspandana is an Integrated Public Grievance Redressal System through which the government promises a one-stop platform for citizens to raise complaints on any government scheme or service *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Woman digs well to provide water for Anganwadi children

COOVERCOLLY INDRESH

SIRSI, 7 FEB

In an inspiring act of selflessness and determination, Gauri Nayka, 55, resident of Ganesh Nagar in Sirsi, Uttar Kannada district, has taken on the task of digging a well to find a solution to the acute water scarcity for the children attending the local Anganwadi Centre No 6. With unwavering resolve, Nayka has embarked on the challenging endeavour of excavating a four-foot-diameter well within the premises of the Anganwadi Centre.

Nayka's son, Vinay Nayka, 35, shared insights into her relentless dedication, highlighting her daily routine and commitment to completing the well within a timeframe of 90 days. Despite facing challenges, including the absence of her late husband, Nayka's unwavering determination serves as an inspiration to her family and community alike.

"Every day, she used to dig one and a half feet, utilising basic tools such as a hoe, pickaxe, basket, and rope to remove soil," he said. Her goal was to complete the well within a month, providing a sustainable water source for the community.

The Anganwadi Centre caters to 15 children in the locality, offering essential care and early education. Jyoti Nayka, a teacher at the Anganwadi Center, expressed profound gratitude for Gauri Nayka's selfless initiative, emphasising the critical importance of access to clean water for the well-being of the children.

—Salar News

Gauri Nayka dug a four-foot-diameter well within the premises of the Anganwadi Centre *PHOTO: SALAR*

- Nayka's son said she used to dig one and a half feet daily, utilising basic tools such as a hoe, pickaxe, basket, and rope

BJP hails govt's decision to provide good quality rice

BANGARAPET, 7 FEB

BJP Yuva Morcha Vice President Om Shakthi Chalapathi welcomed the Union Government's decision to provide good quality rice at the doorsteps at a low price of Rs 29/ kilogram.

He said nearly 60 metric tons (MTs) of bharath rice sold in Bangarapet and other places that arrived on Tuesday. More than 150 MTs of rice were sold by Wednesday evening. He said more than 2,000 bags of rice sold within two hours, said Chalapathi.

He said the intention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to provide good quality rice at an affordable price has been welcomed. Raghunath, proprietor of PSR Agro Tech who has obtained the rights to sell the rice in Kolar and surrounding places in a radius of 100 km said so far 400 MTs of rice have arrived at his rice mill in Bangarapet.

10 mobile vans with rice bags are moving at various places in Kolar and delivering the same to customers at their doorsteps. He said that he has submitted tenders for 5,000 MTs.

—Salar News

Cong will split soon, says Bommai

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai made prediction about Congress party that it will split soon after Narendra Modi government will be back for a third consecutive term. Bommai criticised the incumbent State government for its failures across various fronts. Bommai accused Chief Minister Siddaramaiah of prioritising personal interests over ideology and philosophy, leading to a lack of development works and delays in distributing drought relief funds to farmers.

—Salar News

2 men get 20yrs each for raping minors

KALABURAGI, 7 FEB

The additional district and sessions court sentenced 20 years in prison to two men in different rape cases along with fines of Rs 20,000 each under the POCSO Act.

The convicted are Saibanna Sharanappa Seeba and Majaruddin Chandapasha Jamadar. Saibanna had abducted a minor girl on 24 September, 2022, while she was on her way to college, under the pretext of marriage. He then took her to a remote field in another village and raped her. In a separate incident, Majaruddin was found guilty of raping a minor in December 2021 and intimidating her into silence.

—Salar News

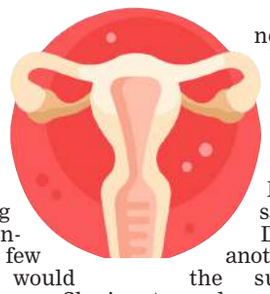
'A COMPLEX PROCEDURE'

B'luru doctors remove 4.5 kg tumour from uterus

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

A tumour, weighing 4.5 kg, was removed from the uterus of a woman in Doddaballapur's Mother-Child Government Hospital.

Shilpa, a 35-year-old woman, was hospitalised with severe abdominal pain. During the examinations, it was found that a tumour had encased her uterus entirely.



"Typically, tumours in the uterus and ovaries are relatively small in size. Had the woman delayed seeking medical attention by just a few days her life would have been in danger. She is now in good health. This surgery was challenging, and we are delighted with the outcome," Dr Archana KL said.

Dr Premalatha, another member of the surgical team, termed surgery as a complex procedure.

"This case presented significant challenges. Before administering anaesthesia, we stabilised the patient's blood pressure and breathing to ensure her safety. Due to the anticipated need for blood transfusion, we had arranged four units of blood in advance."

The surgical team comprised Dr Girish, and Dr Premalatha, along with nurses Gayatri, Nandini, Bhavya, and Raju.

—Salar News

- The surgical team comprised Dr Girish, and Dr Premalatha, along with nurses Gayatri, Nandini, Bhavya, and Raju

TMC leader Sheikh skips ED summons for second time

KOLKATA, 7 FEB

Absconding Trinamool Congress leader Shajahan Sheikh did not appear before Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials on Wednesday. In the evening, Shajahan sent his lawyer to ED office seeking more time to appear before its officers, who is alleged in multi-crore ration distribution scam in the state. The accused TMC leader's request, however, was not accepted by the agency and his lawyer was sent back. This was ED's second summons to Shajahan for questioning in connection with its probe. "We have already started taking possession of the properties of Shajahan and his family members. His house in Sandeshkhali has been sealed. The possession process is on," said ED official. *—PTI*

Court summons Kejri on 17 Feb regarding evading summons

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

A Delhi court on Wednesday asked Chief Minister ArvindKejriwal to appear before it on 17 February on a complaint filed by the ED for skipping summons in an excise policy-linked case and noted that prima facie the AAP chief was "legally bound" to comply.Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate DivyaMalhotra said that Kejriwal "purportedly failed" to appear before the investigating agency Enforcement Directorate and summoned him for the offence under Section 174 of IPC (non-attendance in obedience to an order from public servant).In its complaint, the ED alleged that the Delhi chief minister intentionally did not want to obey the summons and kept on giving "lame excuses." If a high-ranking public functionary like him disobeyed the law, it would "set a wrong example for the common man i.e. the AamAadmi," the agency said. *—PTI*

Will not step down: Bihar Assembly Speaker

PATNA, 7 FEB

"I am not going to resign. I will be in the assembly on 12 February and conduct proceedings of the House as per rules," said Bihar Assembly Speaker AwadhBihariChaudhary, on Wednesday. The newly formed NDA government has moved a no confidence motion on Chaudhary. Senior RJD leader made it clear that he will not resign from the post before the commencement of the budget session. It was pointed out to him that according to BJP-led coalition, which has snatched power from the Mahagathbandhan, a Speaker cannot be in the chair with a no confidence motion pending.NDA, which enjoys majority, is wary of the floor test conducted with a Speaker from the main Opposition party in the chair. *—PTI*

Firing by BJP MLA on Sena leader: 1 more accused held

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

Thane police have arrested one more person in the case where BJP MLA GanpatGaikwad is accused of firing on a Shiv Sena leader inside a police station, on Wednesday. The accused, identified as Divesh alias Vicky Ganatra,3, a supporter of MLA, was on the run since the firing incident took place on 2 February. With this, four people, including MLA, have been arrested so far in connection with the incident. On 2 February, Gaikwad allegedly opened fire at local Sena leader Mahesh Gaikwad and one more person inside Hill Line police station at Ulhasnagar in Thane GanpatGaikwad, Ganatra and four others were booked for attempt to murder and various other charges. After the incident, MLA's son Vaibhav, Ganatra and another accused NageshBadekar were on the run. *—PTI*

Rumours rife on RLD's Jayant joining BJP; SP spooked

SP's Shivpal Yadav says Jayant Chaudhary will continue with INDIA bloc

LUCKNOW, 7 FEB

Amid speculation that Rashtriya Lok Dal's (RLD) Jayant Chaudhary may join hands with BJP, senior Samajwadi Party leader Shivpal Singh Yadav on Wednesday accused the saffron party of "creating confusion" and said the former will remain with INDIA bloc.

"BJP is doing the work of creating confusion. He (Jayant) is not going anywhere. He will remain with INDIA bloc with full strength and will do the work of defeating BJP," Yadav told reporters when asked about the speculation regarding RLD going to the BJP-led NDA ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

Samajwadi Party (SP) national General Secretary said Chaudhary will remain with the INDIA bloc and defeat the BJP in the general elections. "I know Jayant, he is a secular person," he added.

RLD and SP announced their alliance for the Lok Sabha polls on 19 January with the former stating that the latter will leave seven seats in western Uttar Pradesh for its nominees.

SP President Akhilesh Yadav and Chaudhary announced the tie-up on social media for the general elections later this year. "Congratulations to everyone on the alliance of RLD and SP. Let us all unite for victory," Yadav had said in a post on X.

Reposting this tweet, Chaudhary had said, "Always ready to protect national and constitutional values. We expect all workers of our alliance to move forward together for the development and prosperity of our region."

He also posted pictures of the two leaders shaking hands.

RLD's core vote bank has been the Jat population. The Lok Sabha constituencies where there is maximum Jat population are Muzaffarnagar, Kairana, Bijnor, Mathura, Baghpat, Amroha and Meerut.

These could be the seats on which the RLD is likely to contest. Both the parties had contested the 2022 Assembly elections in an alliance as well in which the SP had won 111 seats while the RLD bagged 8 seats. *—PTI*

Jayant Chaudhary **PHOTO: PTI**

- A Samajwadi Party national general secretary said JayantChaudhary will remain with the INDIA bloc and defeat the BJP in the general elections. SP president AkhileshYadav and RLD chief JayantChaudhary announced the tie-up on social media for the general elections later this year

SWITCHING SIDES

15 former MLAs, ex-MP from Tamil Nadu join BJP

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

A number of leaders from Tamil Nadu, including 15 former MLAs and an ex-MP, joined the BJP, on Wednesday. Ruling party looks to strengthen its presence in the southern state in the run up to LokSabha elections.Most of these leaders are from AIADMK, a former BJP ally in the state, and the joining took place in the presence of Union ministers Rajeev Chandrasekhar and L Murugan besides state BJP president K Annamalai.

Welcoming them, Annamalai said they bring a wealth of experience to the BJP and want to strengthen the hands of Prime Minister NarendraModi as he is coming back to power for a straight third term.

Chandrasekhar said the joining at such a big scale shows Modi's popularity in a state like Tamil Nadu, where BJP has traditionally been not a big force.

"It is clear that every citizen of India wants the transformation of the last 10 years to continue," he added. *—PTI*

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Nitish Kumar meets PM Modi, assures will never leave NDA again

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar met Prime Minister NarendraModi on Wednesday.

This was their first meeting after Janata Dal (United) president dumped Opposition INDIA bloc and joined BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) last month and later reiterated that he will not leave it again.

Following his meeting with PM, Kumar met Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president JP Nadda and is believed to have discussed a host of governance and political issues related to Bihar. JD(U) chief recalled his association with BJP since 1995, before he broke the ties in 2013.

The meetings came five days ahead of Kumar's government facing a trust vote in the Assembly on 12 February.

Kumar had taken the oath along with eight ministers, including three each from BJP and JD(U), and an expansion of the council of ministers is on the cards.

Both parties have to deal with a number of tricky political issues ahead of LokSabha polls, including the distribution of parliamentary seats for contesting the election among them and their smaller allies.

BJP and JD(U) contested 17 seats each in Bihar during the 2019 LokSabha polls while the then LokJanshakti Party, now divided into two factions, contested on six. NDA now also includes former Bihar chief minister Jitan Ram Manjhi and former Union minister Upendra Kushwaha.

There is also a view that Kumar wants Bihar Assembly dissolved so that its election could be held along with LokSabha polls expected in April-May, but BJP, which has much more strength than JD(U) in the House, might be cold to the idea. *—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar at a meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

- The meetings came five days ahead of Kumar's government facing a trust vote in the Assembly on 12 February

INVITE FOR 'RAZAKAR'

BJP Telangana Executive Committee Member Gudur Narayana Reddy met Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut in Mumbai on Wednesday and invited her to release the Hindi trailer of his film 'Razakar'. The film, produced by Reddy, will release on 1 March, and it is about the killing of Hindus during the regime of Mir Osman Ali Khan, the 7th Nizam of erstwhile Hyderabad State. **PHOTO: SALAR**

ED CONDUCTS RAIDS ON EX-U'KHAND MIN

DEHRADUN, 7 FEB

Enforcement Directorate conducted searches against Uttarakhand Congress leader and former minister Harak Singh Rawat as part of a money laundering investigation on Wednesday. The investigation is linked to two different cases and allegations against Rawat and his associates including "illegal" felling of trees and construction in Corbett Tiger Reserve and acquisition of land in Dehradun for an educational institute run by a trust linked to his family. *—PTI*

ED alleges bribe money passed on as funds to AAP

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday alleged that bribe money generated from corruption in a Delhi Jal Board (DJB) contract was "passed on" as election funds to the AamAadmi Party that rules the national capital.

"Incriminating" documents and digital evidence apart from valuables of Rs 1.97 crore and foreign currency worth Rs 4 lakh were seized during the raids conducted in this case on Tuesday in Delhi, Varanasi and Chandigarh, the central agency said in a statement.

However, the statement did not specify what was seized from where.

The agency had raided the premises of Bibhav Kumar, personal assistant to Delhi Chief Minister ArvindKejriwal, AAP RajyaSabha MP ND Gupta, former DJB member Shalabh Kumar, chartered accountant PankajMangal and some others as part of this ongoing money laundering investigation.

A CBI FIR, which alleges that former chief engineer of DJB Jagdish Kumar Arora awarded a contract to NKG Infrastructure Ltd. for a total cost of Rs 38 crore despite the fact that the company "did not meet" the technical eligibility criteria, is the basis of the ED case. *—PTI*

EC STABBED DEMOCRACY IN THE BACK: SANJAY RAUT

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut alleged Election Commission has stabbed democracy in the back through its decision to recognise AjitPawar's faction as the real NCP.

The poll panel awarded Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) name and symbol to Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit's faction in a significant decision that has a bearing on the forthcoming polls after many hearings. SharadPawar is the founder of NCP and uncle of Ajit.He also dared Maharashtra Chief Minister EknathShinde and Ajit to form their own respective parties and face the people. *—PTI*

Rahul Gandhi **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP, BJD HAVE PARTNERSHIP IN ODISHA: RAHUL

ROURKELA, 7 FEB

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday accused the BJP and BJD of having a "partnership" in Odisha, and stated that his party has been opposing them to protect the interest of the people, including rights of tribals of the state.

Gandhi resumed his 'Bharat JodaNyayYatra' in Odisha's steel city here. While delivering speeches here, Rajgangpur and Sundergarh, Gandhi said: "As you know (BJD chief) Naveen Patnaik and (Prime Minister) NarendraModi run a partnership government in Odisha. They have joined hands and work in tandem. I find in Parliament that BJD supports the BJP. The BJD people also harass us at the instance of BJP".

Gandhi claimed that it is the Congress party alone which has been opposing the BJD-BJP combine for the people of Odisha. Congress MP said this was also the situation in Telangana where Bharat RashtraSamithi (BRS) was supporting BJP and getting protection from the Centre.

"We have defeated BRS in Telangana and are optimistic to repeat the show in Odisha," he said. Both BJP and BJD rejected the former Congress president's charges.

"It is actually the Congress which has been supporting the BJD in Odisha. We have seen Congress leaders coming to the rescue of the BJD government in the Assembly," BJP MLA Nauri Naik said. *—PTI*

Modi speaks as if he is in Opposition: Stalin

CHENNAI, 7 FEB

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, accused Prime Minister NarendraModi of speaking the language of Opposition and targeting Congress party as if it was the ruling party at Centre, on Wednesday.

On his arrival from Spain, completing his foreign tour to attract investments, Stalin said investment commitments to the tune of Rs 3,440 crore have been made by several companies during his visit abroad and that showed the confidence of multinational firms in Tamil Nadu and DMK regime.

"He 'saw, read, enjoyed and laughed' at it. Prime Minister behaved as if he was an opposition leader and attacked Congress which was a 'puzzle,' that could not be understood, Chief of the ruling DMK alleged.

To a question on Modi's comment that NDA would cross 400-seat mark, he said he would not be surprised if Prime Minister were to make a remark that NDA would go on to win all the 543 seats in LokSabha.

"Is the total only 400? There are 543 constituencies and there will be no surprise if he says he will (the BJP/NDA) win them all."

On 5 February, Prime Minister Modi predicted that BJP will "definitely" get 370 seats and the ruling NDA will cross 400 seats in LokSabha polls as he tore into Congress, saying its "shop" is on the verge of closure.

Stalin, on attracting investments, said his 'Spain trip is very, very useful' in the journey to make Tamil Nadu the top state in country in the industrial sector.

Chief Minister exuded confidence that more investors would come forward to choose Tamil Nadu as their investment destination. *—PTI*

BULLDOZER ACTION

Amnesty calls out unlawful demolitions

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

International human rights organisation Amnesty International in a report alleged that bulldozer action was often enacted under the guise of removing illegal construction and it violated due process outlined in domestic and international human rights law. They also highlighted that Muslim-concentrated localities were targeted, while Muslim-owned properties were selectively demolished, leaving nearby Hindu-owned properties untouched.

A total failure to follow due process

State authorities enforced the demolitions and evictions without offering any prior consultation, adequate notice, or alternative resettlement opportunities. The destruction of buildings sometimes took place at night, with occupants given little or no time to leave their homes and shops, salvage their belongings, or appeal the demolition orders and seek legal redress.

'They beat up my husband'

Amnesty International documented at least 39 cases of the police resorting to unlawful force while carrying out demolitions or preventing victims from collecting their belongings.

At least 14 residents said they were beaten by the police for presenting their official documents and asking why their homes were being demolished. The police hurled abuses at residents, kicked open doors, and dragged people out of their homes before beating them with lathis [batons]. Both men and women were restrained and held in police vehicles.

The use of force by the police was neither necessary nor proportionate. This unlawful use of force constitutes a human rights violation and has also resulted in a range of other violations including the residents' right to adequate housing as well as their rights to bodily integrity, freedom from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and effective remedy, which are enshrined in both the Indian constitution and international human rights law.

Discrimination and complicity of politicians and media

Amnesty International found that Muslim-concentrated localities were chosen for demolitions, while Muslim-owned properties were selectively targeted in diverse areas. Nearby Hindu-owned properties, particularly in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, were left untouched.

The demolitions were often instigated at the highest levels of government, with many state officials directly or indirectly calling for the use of bulldozers against Muslims. Punitive demolitions have been aggressively pursued as a form of extrajudicial punishment over many years and in several states, including Uttar Pradesh whose chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, has been labelled by the media as "Bulldozer Baba" (grandfather).

The media has also referred to the demolitions as "bulldozer justice"; describing the punitive destruction of homes and businesses as "(good) models of governance" by state authorities, while failing to consider whether the demolitions were carried out in accordance with the law or constitute unlawful discrimination against the Muslim community.

Courtesy, Amnesty

'No way to judge poverty due to statistical void in country'

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Congress MP ShashiTharoor said, government is spending money at the top level by raising capex every year as it believes in "trickle-down economics", on Wednesday. Initiating the debate on interim Budget 2024-25 in LokSabha, Tharoor dubbed NDA as "no data available" to reveal the real situation of poverty and consumption in the country. Stating that there is a need for "mid-course correction", Tharoor said the income of middle class, lower middle class and poor has shrunk in the last 10 years of government."The government seems to believe in trickle-down economics. Spend money on top, somebody will benefit down below. If our economy produces what people wish to consume, aamadmi (common man) will be a full participant in the economy.""Ordinary people should be stakeholders in the economic process but government does not see them at all and is just focusing on capex," Tharoor added. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

6 die after portion of building collapses near Ooty

TAMIL NADU, 7 FEB

Six construction workers involved in the construction of a house died when a portion of the building collapsed on them in Lovedale near Ooty in Tamil Nadu on Wednesday. The deceased have been identified as Sakila, Sangeeta, Bhagya, Uma, Muthulakshmi and Radha. They are all aged between 30 to 40 years. "Two workers with serious injuries were taken to Ooty General Hospital while one worker is still trapped in the debris. Rescue and rescue operations are underway," said Ooty Police.Ooty General Hospital Dean Padmini confirmed the deaths of six people. Further information is awaited. *—PTI*

Leopard pounces on car; 1 killed, 3 injured

BILASPUR, 7 FEB

One killed and three others were injured when a leopard pounced on a car, near Bilaspur, on Wednesday. The incident took place when the occupants of the car were returning after attending a marriage in Mandi district. The impact was so much that the vehicle fell into a 150ft deep into a gorge. The nearby villagers informed police on knowing about the incident and the injured were taken to hospital for treatment where doctors declared Himmat Singh brought dead.Ghumarwin police has sent the body of the deceased to Civil Hospital for post-mortem and a case of accident has been registered. *—PTI*

Chakradhari Singh becomes new chief justice of Orissa HC

ODISHA, 7 FEB

Justice Chakradhari Sharan Singh on Wednesday took oath as the 33rd chief justice of Orissa High Court. Governor Raghubar Das administered the oath of office to the new chief justice in a swearing-in ceremony held on Orissa High Court premises here."He was appointed as additional standing counsel in the central government in 1998 and continued as such till October 2001," an official source said.Singh also served as additional advocate general in Bihar and continued his elevation as an additional judge at Patna High Court in April, 2012. He assumed charge as acting chief justice of Patna High Court in February 2023.Last week, President Droupadi Murmu appointed him as the chief justice of Orissa High Court after consultations with the Chief Justice of India, they added. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gyanvapi: HC adjourns plea against prayers

PRAYAGRAJ, 7 FEB

The Allahabad High Court on Wednesday adjourned the hearing on the plea challenging the order allowing Hindu prayers in a cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque to 12 February.The Allahabad High Court heard the matter and adjourned it for 12 February. The Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee, which looks after the affairs of the mosque in Varanasi adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple, had filed the plea on Friday last week challenging the Varanasi court order allowing prayers in the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi Mosque.The Allahabad High Court had not given any immediate relief to the Gyanvapi Masjid committee which had challenged Varanasi court order. *—PTI*

Kerala financially unhealthy state: Centre to apex court

Centre says the state will adversely affect finances of entire nation

NEW DELHI,7 FEB

The RBI has also categorised Kerala among the five highly stressed States requiring urgent corrective measures

PHOTO: PTI

- The RBI has also categorised Kerala among the five highly stressed States requiring urgent corrective measures Centre said

Kerala's financial health and debt situation have attracted adverse observations from successive Finance Commissions (12th, 14th and 15th) as well as the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) and it is one of the most financially unhealthy states as its fiscal edifice has been diagnosed with several cracks, Attorney General R Venkataramani said in a note submitted before the Supreme Court.

Responding to Kerala's government suit, the Centre in its affidavit, apprised the apex court that Kerala has been one of the most financially unhealthy states, and its fiscal edifice of Kerala has been diagnosed with several cracks.

The Attorney General for India has filed a written note in the suit filed by Kerala Government where he said that the debt of states affects the credit rating of the country. "Moreover, default by any state in debt servicing would create reputational issues and will have domino effect endangering the financial stability of the whole of India," he said.

The note has cited the 12th Finance Commission, CAG and RBI report to show the condition of the Kerala state.

"Kerala has been one of the most financially unhealthy States and its fiscal edifice of Kerala has been diagnosed with several cracks. While commenting on the debt situation of the States, the 12th Finance Commission classified Kerala among the States with deteriorating debt situation reflected both in terms of the Debt- GSDP ratio and the ratio of interest payments to revenue receipts," the affidavit said.

The RBI has also categorized Kerala among the five highly stressed States requiring urgent corrective measures Centre said.

"Acute financial crisis faced by Kerala was also recognized in its own. Government's white paper published in June 2016. The paper had noted that the entire borrowing was just sufficient to meet the day to day expenditure, no funds were left for capital expenditure and schemes in the budget had no resources to finance them. A study on State Finances of Kerala conducted by the Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode in 2017 also pointed towards poor public finance management in the State," Centre said.

resources to finance them. A study on State Finances of Kerala conducted by the Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode in 2017 also pointed towards poor public finance management in the State," Centre said.

Centre said that an analysis of current financial situation of Kerala through various financial indicators reveals poor public financial management in the State. Outstanding liabilities of the State as a percentage of Gross State Domestic Product (OSDP) have increased from 31 per cent in 2018-19 to 39 per cent in 2021-22 as compared to the all-state average of 29.8 per cent. *—PTI*

MUMBAI COPS SAY

200 ED case files found with 'extortionists'

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

Mumbai police have found more than 200 files and documents, pertaining to cases being examined by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), on Wednesday.

The cases were in possession of some people arrested last month for allegedly trying to extort Rs 164 crore from a real estate developer.

The six accused arrested in the extortion case had threatened ED action against the real estate developer or even kill him if he did not cough up money.

These details came to light during the interrogation of the accused. Police suspect the arrested people might have extorted more than Rs 100 crore from businessmen and builders by threatening them with ED action against them.

The papers found with the arrested people also include those pertaining to Mahadev betting app case in which more than 30 people have been named as accused.

Last month, a case under IPC section 386 (extortion by putting person in fear of death) was registered at Bandra police station and crime branch is conducting further probe into it.

The main accused in the extortion case is also a builder who was once the complainant's partner in a real estate project.

As per the complainant, he and the builder were jointly redeveloping an old housing society building in Bandra area of Mumbai.

But as the accused's work was not satisfactory, the society gave development rights for the entire premises to the complainant.

Last month, the complainant learnt that the accused was going to file a complaint against him with Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Mumbai police and ED. *—PTI*

Farmers' Delhi Chalo: Police plans to counter protesters

AMBALA, 7 FEB

Ahead of a proposed farmers' march to Delhi, the Haryana Police has stocked up concrete blocks, barbed wire, sandbags, barricades and other items at the Shambhu border here to stop them, official sources said on Wednesday.

This comes two days after Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal claimed that farmers would march to Delhi on 13 February to press for their demands, including the enactment of a law to guarantee the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops.

The sources here also said that police suspect farmers from Yamunanagar, Panchkula and Ambala might gather at the Shambhu border near Ambala and have issued notices to several farmer leaders, asking them not to participate in the protest.

Dallewal has claimed that more than 200 farmer unions from across the country would participate in the "Delhi Chalo" march.

He said farmers would head to Delhi from the Shambhu, Khanauri and the Dabwali borders. The farmer unions are part of the SKM (non-political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha.

Besides a legal guarantee for MSP, the farmers are also demanding the implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, pensions for farmers and farm labourers, farm debt waiver, withdrawal of police cases and "justice" for victims of the Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

In 2020, a large number of farmers from Punjab and nearby areas of Ambala gathered at the Shambhu border and broke police barriers to march toward Delhi.

Farmers mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh held a year-long protest on Delhi's border points -- Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur -- against the three now-repealed farm laws. *—PTI*

AGTF ARRESTS 3 AIDES OF FOREIGN TERRORISTS

CHANDIGARH, 7 FEB

The Anti-Gangster Task Force (AGTF) of the Punjab Police has arrested three associates of foreign-based terrorists--Lakhbir Singh Landa and Harvinder Rinda.

The arrested people, identified as Jobanjit Singh, Joban, Bikramjit Singh, Bikka and Kulwinder Singh and Kala, were carrying out criminal activities on the directions of their foreign handlers.

Taking to social media platform, X, the Punjab Director General of Police, Gaurav Yadav, said, "In a major breakthrough, #AGTF Punjab has arrested three associates that are, Jobanjit Singh @ Joban, Bikramjit Singh @ Bikka and others. *—PTI*

COMMEMORATING SHAH JAHAN'S DEATH

Tourists rush at Taj Mahal during the 369th Urs of Mughal emporor Shah Jahan, in Agra, on Wednesday

PHOTO: PTI

Trade with Pak done via air, land routes: Govt

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The government on Wednesday said some amount of trade with Pakistan is being conducted through land and sea routes but all business through the land border has been stopped by the neighbouring country "unilaterally".

Union Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Anupriya Patel also said in Lok Sabha that it is the responsibility of Pakistan to allow transit of Indian goods to Central Asian countries through its territory. Patel said earlier whatever trade had happened, everything was done through Attari-Wagah border and through Karachi port.

"Now, no trade is being done through land route. But some trade is being done through sea and air," she said.The minister said this trade through sea and air routes with Pakistan is being done through the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust, Inland Container Depot, Tughlakabad, Mundra SEZ, Air Cargo Complex Mumbai and Air Cargo Complex Hyderabad among others. *—PTI*

Delhi manual scavengers to get 20L

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The compensation will be for families of sanitation workers who died due to manual scavenging in Delhi

PHOTO: PTI

The Delhi High Court has recently directed the Delhi Government to make efforts to pay an additional Rs 20 Lakh compensation to the families of sanitation workers who died due to manual scavenging.

The High Court passed the order in terms of the Supreme Court order passed last year. The families had been granted Rs 10 lakh in compensation by the authorities.

Justice Subramonium Prasad said, " This Court expects that the State will endeavour to pay the balance of Rs 20 lakh to all similarly placed persons instead of forcing the family members of persons who have lost their lives in manual scavenging to approach this Court by filing writ petitions."He added, "It is well settled that when a person approaches a court and gets a declaration of law in his favour, it is expected that the state shall extend the same benefit to all similarly situated persons without forcing those persons to approach the court of law."

The petitioner Maya Kaur and others moved the Court for a direction to the Respondents to pay a sum of Rs 20 lakh to the Petitioners in terms of the judgement passed by the Apex Court in Balram Singh V, Union of India, 2023.The Supreme Court had directed the Union and the States to ensure that the compensation for sewer deaths was made applicable from 1993. The current equivalent of that amount is Rs. 30 lakhs. *—PTI*

Trio held for illegal entry from Kuwait to Mumbai

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

- The boat with the trio on board was anchored at Gateway of India on Tuesday. nothing suspicious was found on the boat

Mumbai police arrested three people hailing from Tamil Nadu for entering India illegally, a day after they reached the metropolis on a boat from Kuwait, on Wednesday.

The boat with the trio on board was anchored at Gateway of India on Tuesday. Prima facie, nothing suspicious was found on the boat.

Police arrested them after filing a case under section 3 (a) with penal section 6 (a) of Passport (Entry into India) Rules for not following the due procedures required for entering India.

According to official, the trio had gone to Kuwait two years back for work. They were allegedly ill-treated by their agent who took them to Kuwait following which they escaped from there.The incident has raised concerns over potential maritime security lapses.Notably, 10 Pakistani terrorists who launched a terror strike in Mumbai in November 2008 had arrived by the sea route. The terror attacks had claimed the lives of 166 individuals and left more than 300 people injured. *—PTI*

Meiteis laud border fencing, Kukis oppose

IMPHAL, 7 FEB

Imphal Valley-based Meitei organisations have welcomed the Centre's decision to fence the entire 1,643-km-long India-Myanmar border.

Naga and Kuki bodies in Manipur said "it is not acceptable to them".

In a post on X, Shah on Tuesday said, Narendra Modi government is committed to building impenetrable borders.

"It has decided to construct a fence along the entire 1643-kilometre-long Indo-Myanmar border. To facilitate better surveillance, a patrol track along the border will also be paved," he said.

The move could virtually put an end to the Free Movement Regime (FMR) prevalent along the porous border. The FMR allows people residing close to the India-Myanmar border to venture 16 km into each other's territory without any document.

Manipur shares at least 398 km of border with Myanmar of which 10 km have been fenced.

Coordinating Committee (COCOMI), a joint body of valley-based civil bodies, welcomed the decision to fence the India-Myanmar border but cautioned that no land areas of the state should be compromised during the process.

M Dhananjoy, Assistant Media Coordinator of COCOMI said, "Had the border fencing been done 30-40 years back, we would not have seen the violence we are seeing today". *—PTI*

FIR FILED AGAINST 2

Harda blast was bound to happen: Victims' family

HARDA, 7 FEB

Family members of victims near the firecrackers factory where an explosion killed at least 11 people and injured 174 others in Harda

PHOTO: PTI

Madhya Pradesh Police registered an FIR against two people who have the licenses of firecracker factory in the Harda factory blast incident, an official said.

A woman, who lost her parents in the explosion and blaze at a firecrackers factory in Madhya Pradesh's Harda town, said the tragedy was bound to happen and such a unit should not have been operated in a residential area.

She also held the government and the factory owner responsible for Tuesday's incident, which claimed 11 lives and left more than 200 people injured.

Another woman spent the night on a road as her house was damaged in the incident.

A man residing in the area said they had sought removal of the firecrackers unit from the area, but no heed was paid to their demand.

More than 200 people were engaged in the work of manufacturing firecrackers at the unit located in the Bairagarh locality on Magardha Road, on the outskirts of Harda town, when they heard the first explosion at around 11am on Tuesday.

The factory's surrounding area witnessed chaos as people started running and struggling to reach a safer place.

The firecracker unit was reduced to rubble, with scattered bodies, damaged homes and debris lying all around on roads and open areas. Many houses in the vicinity were damaged.

A burnt and overturned truck was seen lying about 50 feet away from the blast site."The expansion work of the factory and godown was underway. It was bound to happen sometime," Neha, who lost her mother and father in the incident, told PTI in a choked voice.

Her family lives in the vicinity of the factory.

"I hold the government and the factory owner responsible for this incident. They should not have run the factory in the populated area," she said.

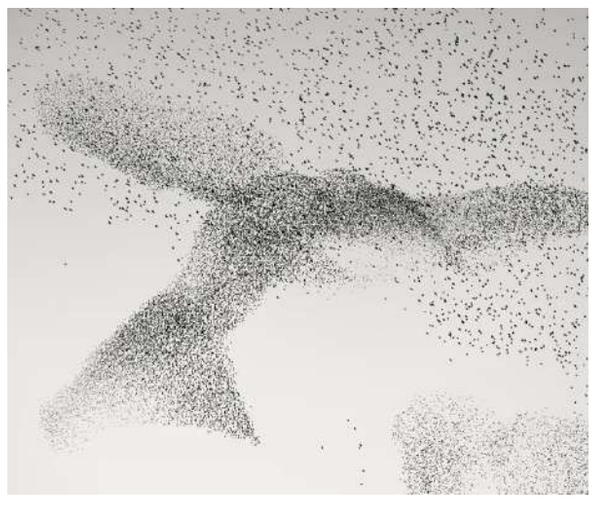
Neha, whose house was also burnt, said such an incident occurred earlier also but the authorities concerned did not pay any attention."People have died earlier also but the government gave permission...the government opens the seal again (of a unit locked after such incidents) as they (owner) deposit the money. What happens?" she said.

Amardas Saini, another local resident, was at his home when the first explosion took place at around 11am.

Saini said the body parts of many people were blown away during this incident. Stern action will be taken in Harda firecrackers factory explosion case: Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav.

—PTI/ANI

NATURE'S MARVEL



A young polar bear drifting to sleep on an iceberg in Norway's Svalbard archipelago; A flock of starlings swirled into the shape of a giant bird in Rome, Italy; Two lionesses and cub in dense bushes, in Kenya's Maasai Mara Mara; Moon jellyfish swarmed in the cool autumnal waters of a fjord outside Tromsø, in northern Norway, illuminated by the aurora borealis

PHOTO: NIMA SARIKHANI/ DANIEL DENCESCU/ MARK BOYD/ AUDUN RIKARDSEN

UCC or invasion of privacy in Uttarakhand?

Under the proposal, partners - the law specifies a man and a woman - must submit a live-in relationship statement to the registrar, who conducts a summary inquiry within 30 days ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Moving in with your partner in India's picturesque Himalayan state of Uttarakhand may soon require informing authorities and complying with a new law regulating "live-in" relationships.

This key proposal within the state's expansive Uniform Civil Code (UCC) - designed to establish a unified personal law for all residents, regardless of religion, sex, gender, and sexual orientation - has garnered more attention than the entire law itself since it was tabled in the state assembly on Tuesday. A common law has been one of the original promises of Narendra Modi's BJP, which also rules Uttarakhand.

Unmarried couples living together is still frowned upon in most parts of India, where these relationships are commonly referred to as "live-in".

Under the proposal, partners - the law specifies a man and a woman - must submit a live-in relationship statement to the registrar, who conducts a summary inquiry within 30 days. During this investigation, the partners might be asked to "supply additional information or evidence" if necessary. The registrar also forwards live-in relationship statements to the local police and informs parents if either partner is under 21.If the official is satisfied, he enters the relationship in a register and issues a certificate; otherwise, partners are informed of the reasons for denial. The official can refuse registration if one partner is married, a minor, or if consent to the relationship is obtained through coercion or fraud.

Partners can terminate the relationship by submitting a statement to the official and providing a copy to their partner. Terminations of these relationships will also be reported to the police.Some 93 per cent of married Indians reported having arranged marriages in a 2018 survey

If partners fail to submit the live-in relationship statement, the registrar, if prompted by a "complaint or information," serves a notice demanding submission within 30 days.

Staying in a live-in relationship for over a month without informing the authorities can invite punishment: up to three months in prison, a fine of up to 10,000 rupees ($120; £95), or both. The punishment for making "false statements" or withholding information about the relationship may lead to a three-month-prison term, a fine of up to 25,000 rupees, or both.

Not surprisingly, the proposed law has sparked criticism from legal experts.

"A few years ago the Supreme Court had ruled that privacy was a fundamental right. The state has no business regulating intimate relationships between consenting adults and what makes this provision worse is the penal consequence a couple may end up facing for not getting the relationship registered . This is an appalling provision and must be struck down," says Rebecca John, a senior Supreme Court lawyer.

Currently, live-in relationships in India are referenced under the 2005 domestic violence laws, defining "domestic relationship" as, among other things, a connection between two individuals "in the nature of marriage".

In a May 2018 poll by Inshorts surveying 140,000 lakh netizens - 80 per cent aged 18-35 - more than 80 per cent of millennials viewed live-in relationships as taboo in India, while 47 per cent preferred marriage in the choice between the two. One out of two Indians felt that living together was important to understand their partner better, according to a 2023 survey by Lionsgate Play, conducted among 1,000 Indians.

India's courts have sometimes frowned on live-in relationships.

In 2012, a Delhi court deemed live-in relationships "immoral" and dismissed them as an "infamous product of Western culture", labelling them a mere "urban fad."

Supreme Court has been more supportive. In 2010, the court endorsed the right of unmarried couples to live together in a case involving an actress accused of outraging public decency. In 2013, it urged parliament to enact laws safeguarding women and children in live-in relationships, ruling that such relationships were "neither a crime nor a sin", despite being socially unacceptable in the country. (In Uttarakhand's contentious proposed law, a deserted woman can seek maintenance from her live-in partner through the courts, and children born from such relationships will be deemed legitimate.)Many fear the Uttarakhand law may drive away cohabiting couples, encourage reporting on them, and make landlords hesitant to rent to "unregistered" couples. Also, they say, the idea of counting and registering live-in couples seems peculiar in a country that hasn't conducted a population census since 2011.

—BBC News

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

In a historic shift Wall Street chooses India

CHINA SNUBBED

If the nation continues to expand at 7% , the market size can be expected to grow on average by at least that rate ***PHOTO: PTI***

A momentous shift is under way in global markets as investors pull billions of dollars from China's sputtering economy, two decades after betting on the country as the world's biggest growth story.

Much of that cash is now heading for India, with Wall Street giants like Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and Morgan Stanley endorsing the South Asian nation as the prime investment destination for the next decade.

That momentum is triggering a gold rush. The USD 62 billion hedge fund Marshall Wace has positioned India as its biggest net long bet after the US in its flagship hedge fund. An arm of Zurich-based Vontobel Holding AG has made the country its top emerging-market holding and Janus Henderson Group Plc is exploring fund-house acquisitions. Even Japan's traditionally conservative retail investors are embracing India and paring exposure to China.

Investors are paying close attention to the contrasting trajectories of two of Asia's greatest powers. India, the world's fastest-growing major economy, has vastly expanded infrastructure under Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his bid to lure global capital and supply lines away from Beijing. China, on the other hand, is grappling with chronic economic woes and a widening rift with the Western-led order.

"People are interested in India for several reasons — one is simply it's not China," said Vikas Pershad, Asian equities portfolio manager at M&G Investments in Singapore. "There's a genuine long-term growth story here."While the bullish sentiment about India isn't new, investors are more likely now to see a market that resembles the China of times past: a vast, dynamic economy that's opening up to global money in novel ways. Nobody expects a smooth ride. The country's population is still largely poor, stock markets are expensive and bond markets insular. But most are making the crossover anyway, calculating that the risks of betting against India are greater.

History shows that India's economic growth and the value of its stock market are closely linked. If the nation continues to expand at 7 per cent , the market size can be expected to grow on average by at least that rate. Over the past two decades, gross domestic product and market capitalization rose in tandem from $500 billion to $3.5 trillion.

In the US exchange-traded fund market, the main fund buying Indian stocks received record inflows in the final quarter of 2023, while the four largest China funds combined saw outflows of almost USD 800 million. Active bond funds have put 50 cents to work in India for every dollar they pulled from China since 2022, according to EPFR data.

In mid-January, India briefly overtook Hong Kong to become the world's fourth-largest equity market. To some investors, the South Asian nation will only rise higher. Morgan Stanley predicts India's stock market will become the third-largest by 2030. Its weight in the MSCI Inc.'s benchmark for developing-market equities is at an all-time high of 18%, even as China's share has shrunk to its lowest on record at 24.8 per cent.

"In terms of index weights, China would be lower and India bigger," said Mark Matthews, the Singapore-based head of Asia research at Bank Julius Baer, which launched its first-ever India fund last year. "That's the direction."

India is also stepping up efforts to globalize the rupee, albeit at a more modest scale than China's yuan expansion. Still, the potential is there when combined with the government's development of GIFT City — a free market pilot project in western India that aspires to become a global financial hub unhampered by rules and taxes. It's a prospect with echoes of Shenzhen's opening up in 1980 as a special economic zone.

Courtesy, Bloomberg

Pak's polls: Can the next government bring economic stability?

According to a poll released this week, about 70% of Pakistanis believe economic conditions are worsening ***PHOTO: EPA***

It is often tempting to declare every election as the most significant in a country's history. But when Pakistan goes to polls on Thursday – in what some critics warn may be the most unfree election to date – it is no hyperbole to say the stakes are enormously high.

Former prime minister Imran Khan languishes in jail as the authorities crack down on his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, while previously imprisoned and exiled former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is back to contest the vote alongside an array of other candidates from the left to the right.

However, the focus of this election is not only on addressing nearly two years of political instability but, crucially, on establishing a new, steadfast government that can stabilise an economy in crisis for Pakistan's 241 million people.

Some 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, inflation has skyrocketed to more than 30 percent, and according to a poll released this week, about 70 percent of Pakistanis believe economic conditions are worsening.

Last June, Pakistan faced the imminent threat of default, with foreign reserves plummeting to USD 4.4 billion – barely covering a month's worth of imports – while the currency shed more than 50 percent of its value against the United States dollar.

As the country found itself at a precarious juncture, then-prime minister Shehbaz Sharif managed to secure a crucial bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – its 23rd fund programme since 1958 – just weeks before the government's term expired.

The interim government, assuming power in August 2023, confronted the primary challenge of ensuring the continuity of the IMF programme, valued at USD 3 billion.

Spanning nine months, this Standby Arrangement (SBA) IMF deal necessitated tough measures, including the elimination of subsidies on essential commodities, and allowing the rupee value to be determined by the open market.

With the current IMF programme concluding in March, just as the new government will take power, analysts emphasise that the winning party's first order of business must be to re-enter negotiations with the global lender to maintain stability.

Simultaneously, Pakistan faces a looming debt payment crisis, with the central bank reporting USD 24 billion of external debt obligations due by June 2024.

The incoming government needs to negotiate with the IMF for a new programme, while also taking steps to reduce expenses and balance the budget deficit, Karachi-based economist Asad Sayeed emphasises.

In early 2022, then-Prime Minister Khan's decision to reduce fuel prices amid global spikes due to the Ukraine-Russia war violated IMF requirements, leading to challenges for the subsequent government.

Khan's government was deposed in April 2022, replaced by a coalition government formed under the banner of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) – an alliance that also includes Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) party.

Ali Hasanain, an associate professor of economics at Lahore University of Management Sciences, highlighted the enduring challenge of balance-of-payment crises throughout Pakistan's history.

"There is no decade in which we have not stumbled through a balance-of-payment crisis and suffered 'sudden stops' in our economic management, accompanied by rapid, unplanned devaluations of the rupee and a painful spike in the costs of living," he said.

"The government badly needs a plan to tackle this fact. But since this appears almost certainly infeasible, we need to negotiate with our lenders, either through a restructuring of our debt, or through offering equity in Pakistani assets," he added.

These liabilities require the country to repay more every year than what it received, $60bn, in China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) investment in a decade.

Fahd Ali, an assistant professor of economics from Lahore University of Management Sciences anticipated the incoming government struggling to align campaign promises with the reality of a sluggish economy.

"The party manifestos of leading parties promise lavish spending. This would be a tough promise to keep given that it is likely the new government will have to sign another three-year agreement with the IMF," he said.

Economist Sayeed stressed the importance of policymakers helping the country move away from its longstanding "consumption-based growth model".

The latest Pakistan Economic Survey in June 2023 (PDF) revealed that consumption expenditure accounted for almost 94 percent of the country's GDP, while investment's share remained more than 13 percent.

However, Sayeed contended that the most imminent threats faced by Pakistan are the challenges and effect of climate change and climate-induced disasters.

Recalling the floods of "biblical proportions" just two years ago, he emphasised the need for significant investment in climate mitigation and adaptation strategies.

"Climate-related disasters are taking place every year and we need significant investment for climate mitigation and adaptation strategies and policies," he said.

We have to seek investment in this sector, but for that, the issue itself needs to be recognised and acknowledged first."

Courtesy, Al Jazeera

String of attacks on Indian students in US continues

NEW YORK, 7 FEB

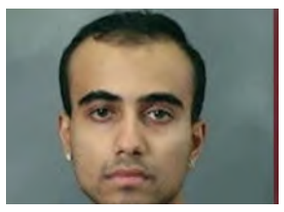
An Indian doctoral candidate was found dead at Purdue University in Indiana while another Indian IT student was brutally attacked near his house in Chicago.

The back-to-back incidents since Sunday were the sixth in the US in 2024 alone. According to The Purdue Exponent, a news agency independent of the university, Sameer Kamath, 23, a doctoral candidate in mechanical engineering, was found dead in Warren County on Monday, the mechanical engineering head Eckhard Groll announced on Tuesday.

Kamath's body was found at a nature preserve at Crow's Grove, the agency said, quoting a press release from Justin Brummett, the Warren County Coroner. After his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Kamath had come to Purdue in the summer of 2021, Groll said in his email. He was slated to graduate from the doctoral programme in 2025.

In another incident, Indian IT student Syed Mazahir Ali was chased and brutally attacked by unidentified men near his house in the US city of Chicago on Sunday, 4 February.

There were videos posted on social media and in one video posted on X, Ali can be seen with a bloodied nose and face and blood stains on his clothes as he describes his ordeal. Ali, who moved to the US from Hyderabad about six months ago, told ABC7 Eyewitness News that one of the attackers pointed a gun at him.



Sameer Kamath **PHOTO: X**

Video surveillance shows Ali walking to his home at night with a packet in his hand when the three men chase him when he was punched by the men in the eye and hit on the face, ribs and back. The ABC7 report said he was taken to a local hospital where he was treated for several cuts and bruises. *—PTI*

- The ABC7 report said he was taken to a local hospital where he was treated for several cuts and bruises

INDIAN IT STUDENT BRUTALLY ATTACKED IN CHICAGO

NEW YORK, 7 FEB

In yet another disturbing incident, an Indian IT student was brutally attacked by unidentified men near his house in the US city of Chicago. In a video posted on social media, Syed Mazahir Ali is seen being chased by three men at night on 4 February. In a separate video posted on X, Ali can be seen with a bloodied nose and face and blood stains on his clothes as he describes his ordeal.

The Indian consulate in Chicago has contacted local authorities investigating the case. *—PTI*

Controversy! Drama! Death! And Pak Polls

Pakistan hints at possible suspension of internet access

ISLAMABAD, 7 FEB

Pakistan's Caretaker Interior Minister Gohar Ejaz on Tuesday indicated about the possible suspension of the internet access in case of security issues in any area on the day of elections which is 8 February, while Amnesty International called for uninterrupted internet access in Pakistan during the polling process, Pakistan-based Dawn reported.

Ejah said that Pakistan's caretaker government will consider suspending the internet service on 8 February only if it receives a request from a district or province considering the security situation. He made the remarks while addressing a press conference along with Pakistan's Caretaker Information Minister, Murtaza Solangi, in Islamabad.

He said that Pakistan had so far not taken any decision regarding suspension of internet access on election day and added that any such decision will only be made after the request from a province or district concerned, according to Dawn report.

He said, "Before taking any such decision for a specific area, the government would look into the nature of the threat as it is necessary to block the online communication of terrorists."

Earlier on 5 February, Solangi ruled out the possibility of an internet shutdown on election day. He said that local administrations had the authority to make such a decision considering the law and order situation and no such situation had so far been reported.

Meanwhile, Balochistan's Caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai said that the internet service will remain temporarily restricted in the sensitive polling booths in the province on the election day, according to Dawn report.

Amid a controversy over the plan to use the new Election Management System (EMS) in the elections, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had announced that the system will work offline even in case of disruption in internet access.

Human rights group Amnesty International has written an open letter urging Pakistan authorities to guarantee uninterrupted internet access for everyone throughout the polling process, Dawn reported.

At least 26 people were killed and multiple others were injured after two back-to-back blasts just before the election day rocked Balochistan **PHOTO: AP**

At least 26 killed in a major blast

At least 26 people were killed and multiple others were injured after two back-to-back blasts rocked Balochistan. The first blast was reported outside the election office of independent candidate Asfandyar Kakar in Pishin a little after noon, the police said. According to Pishin Deputy Commissioner Jumma Dad Khan, at least 14 people were killed and 30 wounded.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has condemned the "terrorism" incident in Pishin, adding that the conspirators involved should be brought to justice. "Targeting innocent people is a barbaric act," the former foreign minister said.He said that the federal and Balochistan governments should identify the elements involved and bring them to justice.

—ANI with Dawn

Pak parties fail to meet 5% legal quota for women

ISLAMABAD, 7 FEB

Ahead of the general elections in Pakistan on Thursday, prominent rights bodies have expressed dismay over the failure of major political parties to allocate at least five per cent of their party candidates for women on general seats.

The legal requirement is set in Section 206 of the Elections Act 2017, the major statute that deals with all aspects of elections.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in a statement on social media platform X advocated for a minimum requirement of women representation, with parties urged to take affirmative action to ensure that at least one-third of their candidates for general seats are women.

"In principle, this should be a minimum requirement, with parties taking affirmative action to ensure that at least a third of their candidates for general seats are women," the HRCP, an independent rights body, said.

Till now there is no consolidated data from the Election Commission of Pakistan on the total number of women candidates fielded by the political parties in the 8 February polls.

The statement underscores the importance of gender parity in political representation, emphasising that increased women's participation is essential for the development of inclusive and representative governance.

HRCP welcomed the decision of the Islamabad High Court to request an explanation from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) regarding the issue.

The move reflects a step towards addressing the systemic barriers that hinder women's meaningful participation in politics.

Aurat Foundation in a statement urged the ECP to ensure that all political parties allocate five per cent of tickets to women candidates on general seats in each of the provincial and national assemblies. *—PTI*

Army soldiers patrol on the vicinity of polling material distribution center to ensure security ahead elections, in Pakistan **PHOTO: PTI**

HOSPITALS ON HIGH ALERT AHEAD OF GENERAL POLLS

ISLAMABAD, 7 FEB

Hospitals in Islamabad are on high alert for any untoward situation ahead of the general elections on Thursday, ARY News reported.

As per a notification issued by Pakistan's Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination, a high alert has been issued from February 7-9. The notification read: "All rural health centers, community health centers, and basic health units under the administrative control of District Health Office Islamabad are kept on high alert during elections 2024 with effect from February 7-9."

Arrangements have been made in federal hospitals given emergencies while the leaves of doctors, nurses, and other staff have been cancelled. Instructions have also been issued to the staff of federal hospitals to ensure attendance. Consultants, surgeons, and CMOs of federal hospitals are directed to remain on-call, as per ARY News.

Meanwhile, human rights group Amnesty International has written an open letter urging Pakistan authorities to guarantee uninterrupted internet access for everyone throughout the polling process, Dawn reported.

—ANI

Russian air strikes claim 3 lives in Ukraine

KYIV, 7 FEB

Russian missile strikes hit Kyiv and other cities, causing at least three deaths and 11 injuries, on Wednesday. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said two people were killed in Kyiv and 10 others were wounded. A man was also killed in the southern city of Mykolaiv. The whole country was put under air alert and attacks were reported as far west as Lviv, near Polish border. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said a downed Russian missile damaged power lines and some households in the capital were without electricity. Ukraine's Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi said Russia had fired 64 missiles and drones, of which 44 were intercepted. According to Ukrainian air force, Russian cruise missiles were detected above the western regions of Lviv, Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk In Mykolaiv, one person who was taken to hospital later died of his injuries, and others were treated at the scene after the attack, which damaged homes and disrupted gas and water supplies. *—BBC News*

PHOTO: AP

Kurt Campbell is the new US Deputy Secretary of State

WASHINGTON, 7 FEB

The US Senate has overwhelmingly confirmed President Joe Biden's top Asia aide Kurt Campbell as the Deputy Secretary of State, described as someone "with deep experience to excel in this position." Considered a veteran in the US-Asia engagement scenario, Campbell, 67, was confirmed on Tuesday by the US Senate in a clear 92-5 bipartisan vote. "I congratulate Kurt Campbell on his confirmation to serve as our new Deputy Secretary of State and thank Toria Nuland who has been serving in an acting capacity. The Department and the nation will benefit from his diplomatic expertise and leadership at this critical time," Secretary of State Antony Blinken posted on X on Wednesday. Local media described his nomination as an effort by the Biden administration, carrying the legacy of his predecessors, to turn the US gaze towards China. *—PTI*

Ex-prez of Chile Sebastian Pinera dies in copter crash

SANTIAGO, 7 FEB

Former Chilean President Sebastian Pinera passed away in a helicopter crash in Chile, according to CNN. The chopper carrying the conservative billionaire crashed in the Los Rios area of southern Chile, according to a statement from his office on Tuesday. It was carrying four passengers, three of whom survived the collision and are "out of danger," according to Chilean Interior Minister Carolina Toha. There was considerable rainfall in the vicinity at the time of the incident, but it is unclear whether the weather contributed to the accident, reported CNN. The Chilean navy retrieved Pinera's body from the site of the crash. Pinera, who was 74 years old, served as Chile's president from 2010 to 2014 and again in 2018-2022. A state funeral will be performed for the late leader, and Chilean President Gabriel Boric has ordered three days of national mourning, but it is unclear as of now when this will begin, CNN reported. *—ANI*

4.3 magnitude earthquake hits Afghanistan

KABUL, 6 FEB

An earthquake of magnitude 4.3 on the Richter scale was recorded in Afghanistan on Tuesday evening, the National Centre for Seismology (NCS) said. According to the NCS, the tremors were felt at about 8:52 pm. The depth of the quake was recorded at 102 km. "Earthquake of Magnitude:4.3, Occurred on 06-02-2024, 20:52:52 IST, Lat: 36.30 & Long: 71.46, Depth: 102 Km,Region: Afghanistan," the National Centre for Seismology said in a post on X. *—ANI*

Hamas responds to proposed Gaza ceasefire plan

GAZA, 7 FEB

Hamas says it has given its response to a framework proposal for a new ceasefire in Gaza.

The details of the deal - set out by Israel, the US, Qatar and Egypt - have not been released. It was earlier reported to include a six-week truce, when more Israeli hostages would be exchanged for Palestinian prisoners.

Israel and the US have both said they are reviewing Hamas's response. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who is currently in the Middle East, said he would discuss Hamas's response with officials in Israel on Wednesday.

While Blinken has given no indication of how the US views the response, President Joe Biden described it as "a little over the top" - suggesting the Israeli leadership will not easily agree to what the group is asking.

A senior Hamas official told the group had presented a "positive vision" in response to the framework but had asked for some amendments relating to the rebuilding of Gaza, the return of its residents to their homes and the provisions for those who had been displaced.

Blinken to brief Israeli leaders on cease-fire

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was set to meet Israeli leaders on Wednesday as Hamas suggested it was open to a new ceasefire and hostage release deal, but both sides remain dug in on thus far elusive goals as the war enters its fifth month.

—BBC News/ AP

Antony Blinken, who is currently in the Middle East, said he would discuss Hamas's response with officials **PHOTO: AP**

ISRAELI MILITARY KILLS DOZENS OF TERRORISTS IN KHAN YUNIS

Tel Aviv, 7 Feb

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) reported that troops from its Paratroopers Brigade killed dozens of terrorists in Khan Yunis over the past 24 hours as IDF ground troops continue to coordinate with the Israel Air Force and Israel Navy in targeted raids on terrorist sites and strikes against terrorist targets throughout the Gaza Strip. In one incident, the troops encountered an armed terrorist cell and thwarted it. The soldiers also located large quantities of weapons including AK-47 rifles, grenades, and explosive devices. IDF troops operating in western Khan Yunis encountered three armed terrorists who launched anti-tank missiles at them. The troops killed the terrorists along with several other terror operatives in close-quarters combat. IDF soldiers conducted targeted raids on a compound used for combat, where they killed a number of terrorists.

—ANI

6 killed, 46 missing as landslide hits Philippines village

MANILA, 7 FEB

A landslide left at least six villagers dead and 46 others missing, in Southern Philippines, on Wednesday.

Army troops, police and volunteers rescued 31 villagers who were injured when the landslide hit the mountain village of Masara in the remote town of Maco in Davao de Oro province on Tuesday night. They resumed the search on Wednesday morning after suspending it the night before due to fears of more landslides.

More than 750 families have been moved to evacuation centres since the landslide struck, disaster response. Among the missing were 27 miners who were waiting to be driven home in two parked buses when the landslide hit in clear weather, Davao de Oro Provincial Spokesperson Edward Makapili said.

Eight miners who were among those waiting jumped out of the bus windows or dashed away and survived.

Torrential rains that have swamped the region on and off in recent weeks have eased and the weather was clear in the previous three days.

Three seriously injured victims will be evacuated by helicopter, regional military Spokesperson Col. Rosa Rosete-Manuel stated.

Earthquakes in recent months had damaged buildings in southeastern region, and more than a dozen villagers have died in recent weeks from flooding and landslides, according to disaster response officials. A landslide buried a house and killed 10 people last month in Monkayo town.

—AP

More than 750 families have been moved to evacuation centres since the landslude struck **PHOTO: AP**

- A landslide buried a house and killed 10 people last month in Monkayo town

PAUL MACKENZIE

Kenyan cult leader charged with 191 murders

MALINDI, 7 FEB

A cult leader, Paul Mackenzie, in Kenya along with 29 others has been charged with 191 murders after more than 400 bodies were found buried in shallow graves in a remote forest in the east of the country.

Survivors and victims' families have said Paul Mackenzie urged followers to fast in order to "go see Jesus".

He and 29 others pleaded not guilty in a court in coastal town of Malindi.

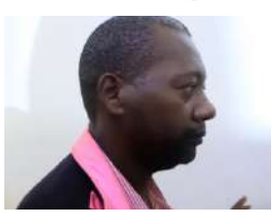
Mackenzie has already been charged with committing acts of terror, child cruelty and torture, which he denied. Police and prosecutors allege that apart from starvation, some victims may have been strangled, suffocated or beaten to death using blunt objects.

"I'm still scared of him. I don't want to ever meet him," said the 29-year-old mother of four", a survivor stated when asked what she would say to Mackenzie if she ever met him.

Neema (name changed) had been a follower of Good News International Church in Malindi until it was closed down in 2019.

When she heard that its leader had moved to Shakahola, the forest about 70km (43 miles) west of town, together with other members of church, she followed him there in 2022. Shakahola is sparsely populated and now under 24-hour police guard. The authorities have declared it a crime scene and access are forbidden.

Initially, the worshippers would travel there and return home. But from late 2022, the followers claim, they were not allowed to leave. *—ANI*



Paul Mackenzie **PHOTO: AP**

- Mackenzie has already been charged with committing acts of terror, child cruelty and torture, which he denied

'Lanka's external debt will take time to restructure'

COLOMBO, 7 FEB

The restructuring of Sri Lanka's external debt is to take much longer than expected, said President Ranil Wickremesinghe's, on Tuesday.

Delivering 'Statement of Government Policy' on the first day of the Fifth Session of the Ninth Parliament, Wickremesinghe said the finalisation of debt restructuring could be completed by the first half of the year, which is going beyond the earlier anticipation for it to be completed within the first quarter.

"The domestic debt restructuring plan has been successfully executed as the first step, and a policy agreement for restructuring has been reached with foreign creditors as the second step. Negotiations with private creditors are presently in progress, Wickremesinghe, who is also Finance Minister, said.

Sri Lanka still has to pay around USD 3 billion per year *—PTI*

Rupee rises 9 paise to close at 82.96 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

The rupee appreciated 9 paise to close at 82.96 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking a correction in the greenback against major currencies and fresh foreign capital inflows.However, a rise in crude oil prices and muted domestic markets capped the sharp gains in the domestic unit, forex traders said.At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.03 against the greenback. The unit hit an intraday high of 82.94 and a low of 83.09. The local unit finally settled at 82.96 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 9 paise from its previous close of 83.05."We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on a rise in global risk sentiments and a soft US Dollar. However, the surge in crude oil prices and hawkish comments from various major central bank officials may cap the sharp upside," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.Traders may take cues from trade balance data from the US. Investors may remain cautious ahead of the RBI's monetary policy decision on Thursday. *—PTI*

Gold jumps ₹170; silver plunges ₹300

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Gold prices jumped Rs 170 to Rs 63,370 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid gains in precious metal's prices globally, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had closed at Rs 63,200 per 10 grams in the previous trade. However, silver plunged Rs 300 to Rs 74,600 per kilogram, while it had ended at Rs 74,900 per kg in the previous close. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,370 per 10 grams, up by Rs 170, taking bullish cues from the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at $2,033 per ounce. However, silver was trading marginally lower at $22.24 per ounce. Amid a pullback in the US Treasury yields and dollar, gold prices rose on Wednesday, Gandhi added. *—PTI*

Canara Bank board to consider stock split on 26 Feb

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Canara Bank on Wednesday said it is planning split of the equity shares of the state-owned bank to boost the stock's liquidity.The decision in this regard will be taken by the bank's Board of Directors in a meeting, which is scheduled on February 26, Canara Bank said in a regulatory filing.The meeting's agenda is "to seek in principle approval from the board of directors for sub-division/split of the equity shares of the bank, subject to prior approval of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other statutory/regulatory/Government of India approvals, as may be required," it said.Shares of the bank were trading 4.16 per cent higher at Rs 542.95 per unit on the BSE. *—PTI*

L&T bags multiple orders in India, Middle East

CHENNAI, 7 FEB

Larsen & Toubro on Wednesday said it has bagged large orders in the domestic market and Middle East.The multiple orders were bagged by the power transmission and distribution business of Larsen & Toubro (L&T), the company said in a filing to BSE.As per company's classification, orders ranging between Rs 2,500 crore and Rs 5,000 crore fall in the category of large orders.Ithas bagged an order to set up a 75 MW floating solar photovoltaic plant on a dam. It is part of the ultra mega renewable energy power park, being developed on Damodar Valley corporation reservoirs in Jharkhand and West Bengal.In Saudi Arabia, the company has bagged an order for turnkey construction of a substation *—PTI*

Stock markets settle flat in volatile trade

Nifty ended marginally up by 1.10 points

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed flat in a volatile trade on Wednesday as investors stayed on the sidelines ahead of RBI's interest rate decision on Thursday.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 34.09 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 72,152. During the day, it hit a high of 72,559.21 and a low of 71,938.22.

The Nifty ended marginally up by 1.10 points or 0.01 per cent to 21,930.50.

IT shares TCS, Infosys and Tech Mahindra declined due to profit taking offsetting gains from select banking and pharma shares.

"The domestic market exhibited cautious rangebound movement, despite robust PMI data and favourable global cues ahead of RBI policy meet. While no change in stance is anticipated, the RBI's commentary on any hints regarding potential rate cuts and improvements in liquidity will be closely monitored," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

Among the Sensex firms, State Bank of India rose the most by 3.78 per cent after the bank announced the acquisition of SBI CAPS subsidiary for Rs 708.07 crore.

JSW Steel, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank and Asian Paints were among the gainers *PHOTO: PTI*

Nestle India gained 1.68 per cent after it reported around 9 per cent growth in sales.

JSW Steel, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank and Asian Paints were among the gainers.

Tech Mahindra, Power Grid, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, HDFC Bank, Wipro, Larsen & Toubro and NTPC were the major laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Shanghai settled in the positive territory while Tokyo and Hong Kong ended in the negative zone.

European markets were mostly quoting lower. The US markets ended with gains on Tuesday.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 92.52 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark climbed 454.67 points or 0.63 per cent to settle at 72,186.09 on Tuesday. The Nifty went up by 157.70 points or 0.72 per cent to 21,929.40.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.66 per cent to USD 79.11 a barrel. *—PTI*

PAYTM SHARES CLIMB FOR 2ND DAY; JUMP 10%

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns Paytm brand, climbed 10 per cent on Wednesday morning, continuing its recovery journey.The stock jumped 9.99 per cent to Rs 496.75 on the BSE after a firm beginning.Shares of the company climbed 9.99 per cent to Rs 496.25 on the NSE.The stock of One97 Communications Ltd rebounded by over 3 per cent on Tuesday after three days of sharp fall.From 1-5 February (three days of trading), the company's stock tumbled over 42 per cent, wiping out Rs 20,471.25 crore from its market valuation, following the RBI's crackdown.

RBI had ordered PPBL, that can take deposits but cannot lend, to not take any further deposits or conduct credit transactions or carry out top-ups on any customers accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, and cards for paying road tolls after 29 February. *—PTI*

FIRMING UP IN INT'L OIL PRICES

Profit margin on petrol has trimmed from low teens to around Rs 3-4 a litre *PHOTO: PTI*

Oil cos losing close to ₹3 per litre on diesel

BETUL, 7 FEB

State-owned fuel retailers are losing close to Rs 3 per litre on selling diesel while the profit on petrol has trimmed due to recent firming up in international oil prices, industry officials said detailing reasons for continuing to hold retail prices.

Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), who control roughly 90 per cent of India's fuel market, 'voluntarily' have not changed petrol, diesel and cooking gas (LPG) prices for almost two years now, resulting in losses when input cost was higher and profits when raw material prices were lower.

International oil prices, against which domestic rates are benchmarked as India is 85 per cent dependent on imports to meet its oil needs, had softened late last year but firmed up again in the second half of January.

- Three firms posted record quarterly earnings in the first two quarters (April-June and July-September) when international oil prices - against which rates are benchmarked - almost halved to $72 a barrel from a year ago

They have resisted calls to revert to daily price revision and pass on softening in rates to consumers on grounds that prices continue to be extremely volatile - rising on one day and falling on the other - and that their past losses haven't been fully recouped.He said the profit margin on petrol has trimmed from low teens to around Rs 3-4 a litre.This fiscal year, things have changed dramatically. The three firms posted record quarterly earnings in the first two quarters (April-June and July-September) when international oil prices - against which domestic rates are benchmarked - almost halved to USD 72 a barrel from a year ago. International prices rose again in the subsequent quarter to USD 90, leading to moderation of their earnings.But, on a year as a whole they had rich profits. *—PTI*

Tata Steel, South East Rly to develop green infra

JAMSHEDPUR, 7 FEB

Private steel major Tata Steel on Wednesday said it will jointly work with South Eastern Railway (SER) to develop sustainable rail infrastructure by utilising its slag-based aggregates.

A deliberation on the project execution was held between officials of the SER and Tata Steel, the company said in a statement.

Utilisation of sustainable alternatives is the need of the hour, and it will also help in conserving the ecology, SER General Manager Anil Kumar Mishra said at the event on Tuesday.

Tata Aggreto, a greener substitute of natural aggregates used in road construction, and Tata Nirman, used as a raw material in manufacturing of fly ash bricks and cement making, will be used in construction of blanketing layers in railway tracks.

PHOTO: PTI

- Tata Steel has set-up a an accelerated weathering facility for processing LD slag through steam ageing

During the deliberation, Rajeev Shrivastava, Chief Administrative Officer (Construction) apprised participants of the plan chalked out to strengthen the rail infrastructure by the Ministry of Railways.

In the endeavour to transform steel slag into sustainable aggregates, Tata Steel has set-up a an accelerated weathering facility for processing LD slag through steam ageing.

The use of slag-based manufactured aggregates helps in the preservation of biodiversity by reducing the need for mining of natural aggregates and eliminates the requirement of transportation of aggregates across large distances, the statement said. *—PTI*

AN INSPIRATION

Kunal Shah, an angel investor, entrepreneur and founder of fintech company CRED and Freecharge, had to resort to working odd jobs like delivery agent and data entry operator due to his family's bankruptcy. This was revealed by Sanjeev Bikhchandan, founder and Executive Vice Chairman of Info Edge which owns Naukri.com, on social media platform X after meeting Kunal Shah at a coffee shop in Delhi. Bikhchandani shared the post a few days back and since then it has accumulated more than 509,000 views. In the comments section, users called Shah's journey "inspirational" *PHOTO: X/ BIKHCHANDANI*

'IMPERATIVE FOR INDIA, US TO COOPERATE ON AI'

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

Microsoft Chief Satya Nadella on Wednesday pitched for greater cooperation between India and the US on artificial intelligence regulations and other norms.The India-born Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the global tech giant said such a partnership can help in equal distribution of economic growth.AI is a powerful new technology that needs to be "diffused" fast to every corner of the world, Nadella said at an event organised by the company here."I think it's imperative especially for India and the United States to be able to cooperate, what are the norms, what are the regulations even, instead of fracturing them," Nadella, who is on a two-day visit to the country, said.He was replying to a question on cooperation between the US and India on AI.He also announced that Microsoft will provide 20 lakh people in India with AI skilling opportunities by 2025.Nadella said AI can help boost GDP growth in the country, and called India as one of the highest growth markets. *—PTI*

- He also announced that Microsoft will provide 20 lakh people in India with AI skilling opportunities by 2025

Reliance to reuse captured carbon, aims for net zero by 2035

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Reliance Industries is charting its path towards carbon neutrality by focusing on capturing carbon and utilizing it for internal industrial processes, rather than storing it underground, revealed PMS Prasad, the company's executive director and board member.According to S&P Global Commodity Insights, speaking at the India Energy Week 2024 in Goa, Prasad outlined Reliance's strategy for energy transition, emphasizing the use of its proprietary technology to reduce costs and achieve greater efficiency.

"We might be different... we are betting on technology. Our approach is based on how to reduce overall costs. It is based on end-to-end manufacturing and it is for internal purposes,"

PHOTO: PTI

Prasad explained during a panel discussion on responsible oil and gas production supporting climate goals.

Reliance Industries, with a net-zero target set for 2035, is investing in renewable components from scratch, including solar modules, wind turbines, and battery technologies.

Prasad highlighted the company's efforts in developing electrolyzes and battery technologies, leveraging partnerships and considering various technological options to achieve its goals.He emphasized the importance of utilizing captured carbon to manufacture chemicals such as methanol and ammonia, rather than storing it underground.

The company's ambitious plans involve investing USD 10 billion over three years to develop new fuels business based on 100 GW of renewable power capacity by 2030, with significant investments in manufacturing renewables equipment, battery storage, fuel cells, and hydrogen production.As Reliance Industries continues to innovate and invest in renewable energy and carbon capture technologies, it aims to play a leading role in India's transition to a sustainable energy future, setting an example for responsible and environmentally conscious industrial practices. *—ANI*

Veg thali cost increases in Jan; non-veg thali rates fall

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The cost of a representative home-cooked vegetarian thali has witnessed a 5 per cent on-year increase in January, while that of the non-veg thali declined 13 per cent, a report said on Wednesday.

According to Crisil Market Intelligence and Analytics (MI&A) Research 'Rice Roti Rate' estimates, the rise in prices of ingredients like pulses, rice, onion and tomato made home-cooked veg thali costlier in January, while decline in poultry rates helped in the fall in non-veg thali rates.

The cost of the veg thali increased due to a surge of 35 per cent and 20per cent year-on-year in prices of onion and tomato, respectively, said the report.

Prices of rice (accounting for 12 per cent of the veg thali cost) and pulses (9per cent) also increased by 14per cent and 21per cent y-o-y, respectively, it added.

The cost of the veg thali increased due to a surge of 35% and 20% y-o-y in prices of onion and tomato, respectively *PHOTO: PTI*

Meanwhile, the decline in the cost of the non-veg thali was due to a 26per cent fall in broiler prices in January, compared to the same month in 2023, amid higher production, the report stated.

However, sequentially, the cost of the veg and non-veg thalis fell 6per cent and 8per cent, respectively.

The ease in cost was due to a decrease of 26per cent and 16per cent month-on-month prices of onion and tomato, respectively, with higher domestic supply of onion amid export curbs and fresh tomato arrivals from the northern and eastern states, the report said.

The cost of the non-veg thali declined faster due to an 8-10 per cent month-on-month dip in prices of broilers, which account for 50per cent of the cost, it added. *—PTI*

'TASK FORCE FOR NON-TARIFF BARRIERS READY

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The government has set up a task force under the Department of Commerce to identify, categorise and develop tailored strategies for the resolution of non-tariff barriers, Parliament was informed on Wednesday.

Such barriers include prior registration requirements in the exporting country, cumbersome testing and certification requirements and unreasonable domestic standards/rules.Different countries enforce various regulatory measures to ensure the safety and quality of the products placed in their territory.

These measures apply equally to domestic manufacturers and importers. However, such measurThe resolution of trade barriers, including ensuring increased and effective market access, is a continuous process and endeavour. *—PTI*

AGAINST MISAPPROPRIATION

FB and Instagram to label all AI generated images

WASHINGTON, 7 FEB

Meta says it will introduce technology that can detect and label images generated by other companies' artificial intelligence (AI) tools.It will be deployed on its platforms Facebook, Instagram and Threads.Meta already labels AI images generated by its own systems. It says it hopes the new tech, which it is still building, will create "momentum" for the industry to tackle AI fakery. In a blog written by senior executive Sir Nick Clegg, Meta says it intends to expand its labelling of AI fakes "in the coming months".

'Easy to evade'

But Prof Soheil Feizi, director of the Reliable AI Lab at the University of Maryland, suggested such a system could be easy to get around.

"They may be able to train their detector to be able to flag some images specifically generated by some specific models," he told the BBC. Meta acknowledged its tool will not work for audio and video - despite these being the media that much of the concern about AI fakes is focused on.The firm says it is instead asking users to label their own audio and video posts, and it "may apply penalties if they fail to do so".

PHOTO: PTI

Monday, Meta's Oversight Board criticised the company for its policy on manipulated media, calling it "incoherent, lacking in persuasive justification and inappropriately focused on how content has been created". The Oversight Board is funded by Meta but independent of the company. The criticism was in response to a ruling on a video of US President Joe Biden. The video in question edited existing footage of the president with his granddaughter to make it appear as though he was touching her inappropriately.The Board agreed that the video did not break Meta's current rules on fake media, but said that the rules should be updated.

From January, the company had a policy which says political adverts have to signal when they are using digitally altered images or video. *—BBC News*

PHOTO: PTI

Bengaluru beat Chennaiyan FC at home

BEGALURU, 7 FEB

A second-half strike from Ryan Williams helped Bengaluru FC (BFC) take a giant leap in the Indian Super League (ISL) here on Wednesday.Williams' goal gave the home side a 1-0 win over Chennaiyin FC at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium, and powered BFC (14 points) from eleventh to sixth on the points table. Williams came good after several chances went begging for his side. Denmark striker Oliver Drost, making his first appearance for BFC, won the ball in midfield and made a short pass to Halicharan Narzary. With a silken through ball, Narzary sent Williams on a run. The Australian shrugged off his marker and slotted it into the net. The introduction of Drost and Narzary - the duo came on together as substitutes - provided impetus to the BFC attack.—*PTI*

PHOTO: AP

WPGT: Sneha Singh takes 2-shot lead over Hitaashee

VISAKHAPATNAM, 7 FEB

Sneha Singh produced three birdies in a span of four holes on the back nine of the East Point Golf Club to take a two-shot lead at the end of the opening round of the fourth Leg of Women's Pro Golf Tour here on Wednesday. A winner of the second leg this season Sneha shot two-under 70 at the par-72 course and was the only player to score under par. Her arch-rival Hitaashee Bakshi who also has a win this season was tied for second with Khushi Khanijau. Hitaashee and Khushi carded 72 each. —*PTI*

PHOTO: AP

Bumrah becomes 1st Indian pacer to top ICC Test Rankings

DUBAI, 7 FEB

Jasprit Bumrah on Wednesday became the first Indian pacer to top the ICC Test rankings after a stellar performance against England in Visakhapatnam. The 30-year-old's nine-wicket match haul has helped him leapfrog Pat Cummins Kagiso Rabada and Ravichandran Ashwin making him only the fourth from his country to attain the number one position. Ashwin Ravindra Jadeja and Bishan Singh Bedi are the other Indians who have been at the top of the charts.—*PTI*

PHOTO: AP

Osaka's comeback hits another roadblock

DUBAI, 7 FEB

Naomi Osaka said she was trying not to feel "like a failure" after her comeback hit another roadblock with a 7-5, 6-0 defeat to former world number seven Danielle Collins in the first round of the Abu Dhabi Open on Tuesday. "I say some pretty harsh words about myself. I know the word, but if I say it, it sounds really bad. I felt a little like a 'failure', but I don't want to be too harsh," Osaka told AFP in the UAE capital after her straight-sets defeat.—*AP*

Kobe beats Inter 4-3 on penalties in a friendly

Lionel Messi put in a 30-minute appearance

TOKYO, 7 FEB

After leaving fans disappointed in Hong Kong, Lionel Messi put in a 30-minute appearance in Tokyo on Wednesday in Inter Miami's latest exhibition match in Asia although he still left some supporters wanting more.

Messi came off the bench for the final half hour, energized his teammates, and probably had the best chance of the match in the 80th with two point-blank shots that were both stopped by the Vissel Kobe defense.

After a 0-0 draw in regulation, the match went to penalty kicks and Vissel won the shootout 4-3. Messi did not take a penalty, however, which brought jeers from the crowd of 28,614 in Tokyo's National Stadium, which seats 68,000.

But it wasn't close to the level of booing that broke out in Hong Kong after Messi stayed on the bench for the entire game with a groin injury. Some fans demanded refunds.

The Argentina star was contrite in a rare press conference in Tokyo on Tuesday as he addressed the public relations disaster. He had said he wasn't sure whether he would be fit enough to play in Tokyo and left fans guessing until he started warming up in the second half drawing loud cheers from the crowd. Vissel hit the post twice in the first half and had by far the best chances in a match it largely dominated. The match in Tokyo wrapped up Inter Miami's global promotional tour stretching from El Salvador to Dallas into Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong and ending in Tokyo.Inter won only one of the six games. The Miami preseason wraps up on Feb. 16 in Florida against Newell's Old Boys, Messi's boyhood club from Rosario, Argentina. —*AP*

Inter Miami's Lionel Messi, right, battles for the ball against Vissel Kobe's Ryuho Kikuchi during the friendly soccer match **PHOTO: AP**

SAFF U-19 WOMEN'S FINAL: INDIA FACES GRITTY B'DESH

DHAKA, 7 FEB

The Indian football team will be out to break a jinx as it takes on hosts Bangladesh in the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship final here on Thursday. Despite improvement in women's football India somehow holds a dismal record in this age group in SAFF. The title has eluded India on more than one occasion the latest being the SAFF U20 Women's Championship in Dhaka last year when Bangladesh pipped them to win the trophy.

—*AP*

Jonathan Tah scored in the 90th minute to send Bayer Leverkusen through to the German Cup semi-finals with a 3-2 **PHOTO: AFP**

Jonathan Tah strikes late to send Leverkusen to German Cup semis

LONDON, 7 FEB

Jonathan Tah scored in the 90th minute to send Bayer Leverkusen through to the German Cup semi-finals with a 3-2 win at home over Stuttgart on Tuesday. League leaders Leverkusen twice came from behind against an impressive Stuttgart side, securing victory in the dying moments for the third time in their past five matches. With the match headed for extra time, midfielder Florian Wirtz curled in a superb cross for Tah to head home and clinch a memorable victory.

Leverkusen manager Xabi Alonso toasted the victory, telling reporters "Sometimes we win with control, structure, and stability, but today we won with heart, soul -- and that is also very important."

"To score like that gives us lots of energy and positive hope for what's to come," goalscorer Tah told Germany's ARD network.

The win will be a crucial confidence boost for Leverkusen ahead of Saturday's home date with Bayern Munich, who sit two points behind them in the league. Tah however sought to quash trophy talk, saying "What makes us strong is that we're focusing on the here and now and on the tasks we have at hand, not what could happen at the end of the season." Stuttgart goalscorer Waldemar Anton said, "To lose like that hurts enormously, we had the game in our grasp."

With Leverkusen and Stuttgart two of only three-quarter finalists from the top division, this season's German Cup represented a real chance of silverware, particularly with Bayern, Borussia Dortmund and holders RB Leipzig already eliminated.

Stuttgart, who sit third in the table this campaign having needed to win a two-legged playoff to stay in the Bundesliga last season, opened with a flurry.

Anton shrugged off center-back Edmond Tapsoba to head in from a corner and give the visitors a deserved lead after just 11 minutes.

Unflappable for much of the season, the early goal took the steam out of Alonso's side, who struggled to handle Stuttgart's intense pressing. —*AP*

India's Davis Cup heroes to headline Bengaluru Open

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Four Indian Davis Cuppers, including Ramkumar Ramanathan and N Sriram Balaji, who played a key role in India's commanding win over Pakistan with their singles performances in Islamabad, will compete in the doubles event of the Bengaluru Open 2024.

Ramkumar has paired up with big-serving compatriot Saketh Myneni, while Balaji has teamed up with Germany's Andre Begemann for the event which will run from February 12-18.

Balaji (WR 78) and Begeman (201) will be the third-seeded team in the 16-team draw with a combined rank of 279. Myneni (WR 107) and Ramkumar (WR 210) are the sixth-best teams in terms of their combined rank of 317.

The top-ranked team in the event will be Frenchman Dan Added (WR 91) and Korea's Yun Seong Chung (WR 167).

They have a combined rank of 258. Dan Added has 11 double challenger titles to his credit and would like to add one more.

He was in tremendous form in the 2023 season, in which he won eight of those 11 Challenger events.

—*PTI*

Kohli likely to miss next 2 Tests

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

India's star batter Virat Kohli is likely to miss the third and fourth Tests against England due to personal reasons, which also kept him out of the first two matches of the series, a BCCI source said on Wednesday.

Chances of Kohli playing the final Test of the series in Dharamsala (from March 7-11) are also remote but the board isn't looking that far ahead as that particular match is still a month away.The third Test will be held in Rajkot from 15-19 February, while the fourth game is in Ranchi from 23-27 February.

On 3 February, PTI had reported that there is no clarity on Kohli's participation in the series and he will only be picked if he is in a position to play.

Virat Kohli **PHOTO: PTI**

Recently Kohli's close friend and former South African skipper AB de Villiers had revealed on his YouTube show that the Indian batting ace is missing in action due to the impending arrival of his second child."The BCCI has time and again made it clear that when it comes to family matters, it stands firmly behind the cricketer and it will be Virat's call when he is ready to make a comeback.

As of now, it looks unlikely that he will play in the series," a BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

The other big question has been Jasprit Bumrah's workload management after the team's bowling spearhead sent down 33 overs for a match-winning haul of nine wickets in the second Test.

It is understood that the third Test's result could go a long way in deciding the course of the series which would make it difficult to rest Bumrah in the Rajkot game. If he plays in Rajkot it is a foregone conclusion that he will not play the next game in Ranchi, which would start in three days after the third Test. —*PTI*

India's Ramkumar and Saketh in action against Ray Ho of Taipei and Piotr of Poland during the second round of men's doubles at the ATP Challenger **PHOTO: PTI**

1st Test: New Zealand thrashes Proteas by 281 runs

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, 7 FEB

New Zealand team members during day four of the first cricket Test match **PHOTO: X**

New Zealand beat an understrength South Africa lineup by 281 runs on the fourth day of the first cricket test Wednesday to take an early lead in the two-match series.

Captain Tim Southee declared New Zealand's second innings overnight at 179-4, with an overall lead of 528. New Zealand bowled out South Africa in the fourth innings for 247.

New Zealand posted 511 batting first and dismissed South Africa for 162 for a 349-run first-innings lead. Southee chose not to enforce the follow-on and Kane Williamson completed his second century of the match, the 31st of his career, before the declaration.

"I think it was pretty good on a good (pitch) for the batters to set it up and the bowlers to take 20 wickets," Southee said. "We knew the South Africa side would be a strong one. You look at them in all sports, they compete, they're a very proud nation so we knew they were going to come out and fight."

South Africa was in trouble early Wednesday, losing the wickets of openers Neil Brand and Edward Moore within the first four overs.

Zubayr Hamza and Raynard van Tonder batted more than 100 minutes to carry South Africa to lunch without further loss. But both were out to undisciplined shots immediately after the break, hastening the end.

David Bedingham lifted South Africa's hopes after lunch with a career-best 87 from 96 balls in a partnership of 105 for the fifth wicket with Keegan Petersen (16).

The partnership occupied most of the middle session and while Bedingham and Petersen were together New Zealand was faced with the prospect that the test might continue into the fifth day.

Bedingham had benefited from New Zealand's short-pitched bowling, hitting 13 fours and a six. But he chased a short ball once too often and fell to Kyle Jamieson not long after the tea interval.

Jamieson removed both partners as South Africa slumped from 178-4 to 181-6. Bedingham tried to pull a ball which reached him sooner than he expected and his miscued shot flew to Mitchell Santner at deep midwicket.

Petersen attempted to hook a ball which bounced to chest height, tucked him up and his pull shot was taken by Rachin Ravindra at fine leg.

New Zealand 511 (Ravindra 240, Williamson 118, Brand 6-119) and 179 for 4 dec (Williamson 109, Conway 29, Brand 2-52) beat South Africa 162 (Petersen 45, Henry 3-31, Santner 3-34) and 247 (Bedingham 87, Jamieson 4-58, Santner 3-59) by 281 runs.

—*AP*

AVAILABLE AS A BATTER

Pant is playing the entire IPL: Ponting

MELBOURNE, 7 FEB

Rishabh Pant is confident of playing the entire IPL but the flamboyant cricketer could only be available as a batter and not behind the stumps, according to Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting.

Pant was involved in a life-threatening car accident in December 2022 that forced him to undergo ligament reconstruction surgeries. "Rishabh is very confident that he's going to be right to play. In what capacity we're not quite sure yet," was quoted as saying by 'ESPNCricinfo'.

"You would have seen all the social media stuff, he's up and about and running well. But in saying that we're only six weeks away from the first game as well. So we're not sure if we'll get wicketkeeping out of him this year."

Rishabh Pant **PHOTO: PTI**

Ricky Ponting **PHOTO: PTI**

"We'll just keep our fingers crossed and hope that he can be out there and play. Even if it's not all the games, if we can manage him through 10 of the 14 games or whatever that might be then whatever games you can get out of him will be a bonus."

In case Pant is not able to fulfill wicketkeeping duties, the 26-year-old could play as a pure batter or could be used as an Impact Player in the upcoming IPL, expected to begin in March.

"But I'll guarantee if I asked him now he'll say, 'I'm playing every game, I'm keeping every game and I'm batting at No.4.' That's just what he's like, but we'll keep our fingers crossed.

"He's such a dynamic player. He's our captain. We missed him incredibly last year. If you understand the journey he's been on for the last 12-13 months, it was a horrific incident. One that I know he feels very lucky to have even survived, let alone have the chance to play cricket again."

Warner to lead if Pant is unavailable

David Warner led the Capitals last season and Ponting confirmed that star Australian batter would be captain if Pant is unavailable to do the job.

The franchise picked up young England batter Harry Brook for Rs 4 crore at the auction last year. While Ponting is happy with his squad, the two-time World Cup-winning captain acknowledged the team has underperformed in the past two seasons.

"Marsh and Warner will bat up the top somewhere and Harry Brook has been finishing off with England, so he'll probably play a finishing role for us there.

"[If] we can get [Anrich] Nortje and Jhye Richardson fit, and with the two spin options we've got with Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav we've got a really good squad that to be fair has probably underperformed the last couple of years, so we've got some work to do."

—*AP*

We don't do team meetings anymore: Joe Root

VISAKHAPATNAM, 7 FEB

England under Ben Stokes are not big on team meetings and prefer organic conversations about the game to get the best out of players, says the team's batting mainstay Joe Root. Root, who is yet to make big runs in the ongoing Test series against India, has fully bought into England's aggressive style of play in the longest format. Their five-match series against India is locked at 1-1 after the hosts bounced back to Trump 'Bazball' here on Monday in the second Test."We don't do team meetings anymore. That's one of the great things about how we do all of our conversations away from the game and just that enjoyment and buzz about spending time with each other," Root had told 'Jio Cinema' before the game here."We don't have to sit in a meeting room and I think it's more authentic and more genuine when you can have it around a dinner table. —*PTI*